



AUSTRALIAN

REGIONAL JOURNALISTS:

WHAT THEY NEED AND HOW THEY SEE THE FUTURE

• Caroline Fisher • Sora Park • Saffron Howden • Jee Young Lee • Kieran McGuinness

NEWS & MEDIA
RESEARCH CENTRE



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

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NEWS & MEDIA RESEARCH CENTRE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This study focusses on regional journalists across the country, what they need to keep serving their local communities, and how they see the future.

The contraction of news services in regional Australia over the past decade has led to increasing concern about the future of journalism in Regional Australia. This has been heightened by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The health crisis has hastened the decline of already vulnerable news outlets. While audiences have increasingly turned to news for information about the spread of the virus, the rapid withdrawal of advertising resulted the closure or suspension of many local news outlets. Since 2019, it is estimated more than 200 local and regional news services have temporarily or permanently shut down.

While we can't predict how well the regional news industry will recover, we do know that reliable local news in times of emergency is essential. The dedicated reporters in regional newsrooms will need more support than ever to meet the needs of their communities in a time of ongoing transition and uncertainty.

There have been government and industry programmes developed to assist regional journalism, but the voices of practitioners are often missing from the debate. The central aim of this study was to find out what regional journalists themselves need to keep serving their communities and how they see the future. This report is based on a survey of 307 regional journalists working TV, radio, print and online, and 31 in-depth interviews. The research was conducted prior to the outbreak of COVID-19.

KEY FINDINGS

Regional journalists are very busy multitaskers who work across a range of platforms, roles and stories. The majority are in full-time employment (86%), but female journalists and those working for independent local outlets are more likely to be part-time.

STRONG CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

Regional journalists feel they have a closer connection to the community they report on, than journalists in the city. Journalists working for local independent news outlets are more likely to see themselves as

advocates for their local community. They are committed to serving their communities and find it satisfying. Those who work for larger news organisations were less likely to see themselves as champions of local community who advocate for change, whereas print and online journalists were much more likely to embrace this role. Female journalists were much more likely to see themselves as community advocates than male.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Over the past five years, social media was nominated by 95% of these regional journalists as the biggest change to their work, followed by the need for more visual content. While social media was used by many to research stories and find contacts, many feel it is taking them away from their reporting responsibilities, particularly as their time and resources were limited.

Regional journalists spent an average of 2 hours and 18 minutes a day online to stay up-to-date, promote their stories and moderate audience comments on social media. Embracing social media was seen to be an important way to engage younger news audiences and audiences in remote areas. However, the constraints in resources and time hindered these opportunities especially among independent print media and for those with longer journalism experience.

CONFIDENCE WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The majority of the respondents (75%) reported some degree of confidence in using digital technology. Those with 5-10 years reporting experience were the most confident. Those with 10+ years were the least likely to be confident with digital technology.

TRAINING RECEIVED

Almost two-thirds (63%) said they had participated in some kind of training over the past twelve months. Training in digital skills (63 cases including 21 who received Google News Initiative (GNI) training) was the most common type of training regional journalists had received, followed by media law (26 cases), and general journalism skills (21 cases).

TRAINING NEEDS

There is a high demand for digital training.

There is also high demand for support in general journalism practice (writing, headlines, building contacts) and more specialist reporting skills (court reporting, data journalism, investigative, FOI). There is also big demand for audio, video and photography skills and media law. Senior journalists with 10+ years' experience want digital skills training (28%) the most. Mid-career journalists with 5-10 years' experience feel the need for audio/video skills (19%) and digital skills (19%). Junior journalists most wanted audio/video skills training (16%) and to a lesser degree, digital skills (14%). Leadership and management skills were also regarded as important especially among mid-career journalists. While journalists identified the need for accessible training, they were also mindful of the available time to actually engage with it.

JOB SATISFACTION

Overall, regional journalists enjoy being journalists, but they are less happy about their hours and pay. Younger journalists and those working for larger news organisations are less satisfied with the pay and hours. TV journalists were the least satisfied with the job, hours and job flexibility and were the most concerned about job security. Newspaper journalists were the least worried about job security.

OBSTACLES

For regional journalists, shortage of time is the most significant obstacle affecting their ability to perform their jobs, followed by lack of resources. Geographical distance, technology and management by their employer were also among the top factors.

• LACK OF RESOURCES

A lack of time, staff and money were identified as the biggest obstacles to their work. A shortage of staff means there is no back up for those in small or single person newsrooms. There is rarely any paid overtime and some reporters feel torn about whether to cover important weekend and after-hours events, knowing they won't be paid. While they are entitled to time off in lieu (TOIL), it is difficult to take because they are so short staffed. This can pose a dilemma for journalists wanting to cover their community but also needing to be remunerated for their time. Mid-career journalists deemed the lack of resources and

workload to be critical obstacles. For junior journalists it was the lack of time. The most urgent issue to be resolved is increasing the resources for news production whether in the form of new public funding, reallocating existing resources or increasing advertising revenue.

• HEAVY WORKLOADS

While they enjoy the work of journalism, many feel overworked and find it hard to strike a work-life balance. On average they are expected to produce around 6 stories a day (median is 5 stories a day), but during major events, such as bushfires, the demand is much higher.

• WELLBEING

In the interviews, geographic isolation and stress were identified as having a negative impact on the wellbeing of some journalists. This was mentioned in relation to reporting on traumatic events, such as bushfires and by younger journalists who had moved away from family and friends for the job.

• CITY-BASED MANAGEMENT

Regional-based journalists working for larger news outlets commonly talked about poor communication with city-based editors and managers. There was a perception that city-based editors did not understand the working conditions in the regions and did not recognise stories important to those communities. Some also expressed the need for mentoring from a senior journalist in the organisation.

THE FUTURE

Despite the high levels of concern about the future of regional journalism, those on the ground were generally optimistic. However, there was a difference between those who worked for small independent outlets and larger organisations. Journalists working for independents were more optimistic about the future because they felt their connection to community was strong and the news they provided was highly valued. In contrast, those interviewed who worked for larger organisations were less optimistic and tended to feel less secure in their jobs. It must be remembered that this research was conducted just prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and their views about the future might have been different if asked today.



INTRODUCTION



There is growing concern about the future of regional and local news media.

In the past few decades, digital technology has had an enormous impact on the field of journalism. On the positive side, it has increased the amount of information available to journalists and improved their ability to interact with audiences. On the downside, digitisation has placed journalism under great strain following the shift of advertising revenues online. This has undermined the stability of traditional business models and led to closures, amalgamations and job losses in news organisations across the country. Some estimates calculate the losses over the past ten years across all news media is close to 5,000 jobs (Simons & Dickson, 2019). The economic impacts of COVID-19 have amplified these stresses. The closure and suspension will add further job losses to this total.

Research shows the decline of newspapers has affected regional areas more than the cities. Estimates prior to the COVID-19 outbreak on job losses from print newsrooms amounted to more than 1,000 jobs (Zion et al., 2016; Zion et al., 2017). This fall in newspaper consumption is clearly reflected in research which shows a rapid drop in the use of newspapers by regional and rural news consumers since 2016 (Digital News Report: Australia, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019). A report by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC 2019, p.18) stated “between 2008 and 2018, 106 local and regional newspaper titles closed across Australia, representing a net 15 per cent decrease in the number of these publications”. Further, 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) are not being covered by local newspapers. Sixteen of those LGAs are in regional parts of the country. Not only has there been a decline in covering local government, but also a decline in covering local courts (Simons & Bosland, 2019). There have since been further closures. Important work is being done by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI, 2020) and others, to map the closure of news outlets across Australia in response to the economic impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. In the US, research shows the lack of media scrutiny of local institutions led to increased spending and costs to local communities (Gao, Lee & Murphy, 2020).

In the face of such ongoing pressures, inquiries, such as the ACCC Platforms Inquiry (2019), the Finkelstein Inquiry into media regulation (2012), and the Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism (2018), called upon government and industry to investigate ways to provide support to Australian journalism broadly, and regional news outlets specifically to address the impact of the loss of advertising on their viability. Some measures have been implemented, such as the federal government’s Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package, which included funds for innovation, scholarships for regional journalism students, and cadetships for regional newsrooms. Industry has also offered training and grants programmes such as those via The Walkley Foundation, Judith Neilson Institute (JNI), and Google News Initiative. Additional funding from the JNI and the federal government was also announced to support journalism during the COVID-19 outbreak, as well

as the development of a mandatory code of conduct between the major tech platforms and news media companies to help level the playing field.

While governments and news organisations seek solutions, we felt it was timely to examine the needs of regional journalists in Australia and hear from the practitioners themselves, to help inform the way ahead. While regional news consumers still rely heavily on television, local and regional newspapers, they are adapting to online news, especially through mobile devices. Digital platforms provide cost-effective ways of disseminating news. However, producing quality news needs high levels of investment. Although it has become easier to access quality news at the national and international level, the provision of quality local news is declining (Peterson, 2019). In smaller regional and rural communities this can have a profound impact on the local sense of community, citizen engagement and sense of belonging (Bowd, 2017; Ewart, 2000; Ewart & Massey, 2005; Hess & Waller, 2014; Hess & Waller, 2019).

Because of the importance of local news provision to community identity and participation, increasing attention is being paid to the impact of digitisation on regional news markets. The Centre for Media Transition (CMT) conducted a small survey of 25 print and digital news editors and publishers from South Australia and Victoria (Fray & Giotis, 2019). It explored issues around business models and future viability. Drawing on interviews with 31 journalists, editors and other media workers in three diverse regional communities, Carson et al. (2016) found journalists were

adapting to the more straightened financial environment by working more closely with community sources. A major study by Deakin University in partnership with the Country Press Association, examining media innovation and country newspapers, led by Kristy Hess, will make an important contribution to our understanding of the future of regional journalism in Australia.

While there is a large body of research about the impact of digital disruption on journalism practice generally, there has been less work examining the training needs of journalists in regional Australia. This study involving a survey of 307 and interviews with 31 regional journalists, helps fill this gap.

It is important to note that this survey cannot claim to be representative of all regional journalists in Australia. Instead, this pre-COVID-19 study provides a snapshot of approximately 15% of regional journalists in Australia across print, online, radio and television. It sheds light on the changes and challenges they face, their needs, and hopes for the future as they deal with the impacts of digitisation, economic upheaval and government policy in their daily working lives.

To that end, we hope this study faithfully reflects the perspectives of the busy regional journalists who generously participated, and that it is useful to industry and policy makers as they seek new ways forward.

NUMBER OF REGIONAL JOURNALISTS IN AUSTRALIA

The number of regional journalists in Australia is in flux. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census, there are about 14,000 journalists in Australia of which approximately 15% are in regional areas. The majority of journalists work in the city. According to Telum Media data, at the time of this survey, there were 875 regional news media outlets (TV, newspaper, online and radio) among 4,693 in Australia (18%). Given that about 30% of the population live in regional areas, these figures alone indicate underserved regional news consumers.

The most recent survey of Australian journalists was conducted as part of the Worlds of Journalism Study in 2012-2013 and involved 605 journalists (Hanusch, 2016). According to that study, Australian journalists are more likely to be female (56%), in their late thirties (average 38 years and median 35) and have a university degree (82%) specialising in journalism or communication (81%).

NUMBER OF REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS

The number of regional newspapers is also changing rapidly. At the end of March 2020, there were an estimated 578 regional and rural newspapers in Australia. This figure does not include capital city or suburban community newspapers. It should be noted there is no single, complete list of regional and rural newspapers in Australia and many of them are out of date. To address this, we cross checked data from several sources including the Telum data base, Australian Press Council, Country Press Australia, Australian Community Media, Wikipedia, and the National Library.



METHOD AND DATA

This study draws its findings from an online survey and qualitative interviews conducted with Australian regional journalists. The Telum Media database was used to identify as many journalists working in regional areas as possible.

In this study, the term ‘regional’ refers to areas outside of capital cities. This is the definition used by Telum in the creation of its contact database. This differs from the classification used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which classes population centres such as Newcastle and Queanbeyan as non-regional. The term ‘journalist’ refers to traditional conceptions of those who work in news reporting along with new positions in digital news outlets. The journalism roles in this study include: Managing editors (organisational management); Editors/Senior editors/Chiefs of Staff (editorial content); Sub-editors; Producers; Reporters; Digital reporters/editors; Social media producers; Trainees/cadet; and Others.

THE SURVEY

We sent emails to all journalists in the Telum database that were based in a regional area. In total we identified 2,340 journalists in the database who worked in regional areas across 1,409 media outlets. For the purposes of the study we included TV, radio, online and print news media.

An email invitation to participate in the online survey was sent to each identified journalist on Monday, 14 October 2019. The invitation was sent in the morning for print and television journalists and in the afternoon for radio journalists. Reminders were sent once a week for four weeks.

In order to increase participation, the research team reached out to regional journalists via social media (LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter) and through the university website (<http://bit.ly/regionaljournalists>). Regional journalists who were not included in the Telum database were invited to participate by contacting the research team. There were 34 responses to this invitation. This resulted in a pool of 2,374 journalists (2,340 from the Telum database and 34 additional via social media contacts).

A total of 2,374 invitations were sent with a response rate of 13% (307 responses). While the results of this survey cannot claim to be representative of all regional journalists, it is the largest survey to date and reflects a diversity of perspectives across platforms, ages, gender and experience level.

The survey was anonymous and all identifying information was removed from the survey responses for coding. The characteristics of respondents are reported in Table 1.

Of the respondents, 53% were female and 44% male, and the average age of respondents was 38 years. About 80% of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 78% had a degree in journalism and communication related fields. This reflects the makeup of Australian journalists generally (Hanusch, 2016).

In this regional study, 42% of the respondents reported having more than 10 years of experience working as a journalist, 39% less than five, and 19% 5–10 years. Of the respondents, 25% had worked

in their current organisation for more than 10 years, 17% for five to ten years, and 58% for five years or less. Most of the respondents (86%) were employed full-time and only 7% were part-time.

The majority of the respondents worked for media organisations with 10 or less staff (84%), with 15% working alone (one staff), 39% working for an organisation with two to five staff, 30% working for an organisation with 6-10, and 16% working in larger organisations with 10+ staff. The majority (65%) were employed by a bigger state or national media outlet, 20% worked for an independent news organisation serving a number of regional or rural areas, and 14% for an organisation serving a single regional or rural area.

The type of media ranged from print (60%), television (15%), radio (17%), online (30%), and news agency (1%). Many worked across different platforms.

Table 2 | Type of media organisation

| | Number | Percent |
|-------------|--------|---------|
| Print | 185 | 60 |
| Television | 46 | 15 |
| Radio | 52 | 17 |
| Online | 91 | 30 |
| News agency | 3 | 1 |

Note: Respondents could select multiple responses

Most of the respondents (75%), were born in Australia and only one participant in the sample identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Table 1 | Respondent characteristics

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|------|
| Gender | Male | 44% |
| | Female | 53% |
| | Prefer not to say | 3% |
| Age | Mean | 38 |
| | Median | 34 |
| | 20s | 41% |
| | 30s | 20% |
| | 40s | 15% |
| | 50+ | 24% |
| Education | Diploma/certificate or below | 20% |
| | Bachelor or above | 80% |
| Degree | Journalism/communication degree | 78% |
| | Other degree | 22% |
| Years working as a journalist | less than 5 | 39% |
| | 5-10 | 19% |
| | 10+ | 42% |
| Years with current employer | less than 2 | 28% |
| | 2-5 | 30% |
| | 5-10 | 17% |
| | 10+ | 25% |
| Employment status | Full-time | 86% |
| | Part-time | 7% |
| | Freelancer/contractor/self-employed | 6% |
| | Trainee/cadet | 0.3% |
| Number of staff | 1 | 15% |
| | 2-5 | 39% |
| | 6-10 | 30% |
| | 10+ | 16% |
| Type of organisation | Independent serving a single rural/regional area | 14% |
| | Independent serving a number of regional or rural areas | 20% |
| | Part of a bigger state or national organisation based in a regional or rural area | 65% |

THE INTERVIEWS

In the survey, we asked respondents to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up in-depth interview. Among the 115 respondents that indicated interest, 31 regional journalists were interviewed between December 2019 to February 2020. The interviews were conducted on the basis of anonymity and all identifying information has been removed.

From the interviews, we selected four case studies for further in-depth analysis. Permission was sought from those individuals to be named prior to publication.

Among the follow up interviewees (31 participants), 18 were female (58%) and 13 were male (42%); 21 were employed at a regional newspaper (68%), 6 in a radio newsroom (19%) and 4 in a television newsroom (13%). There was a good balance between the type of organisation with 9 (29%)

participants working for independent news organisations, 17 (55%) working for large news organisations, and 5 (16%) working for a public broadcasting service.

The interviews were conducted over the phone or using the voice-over-IP service Zoom and lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. They were recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed. Interviewees came from a range of backgrounds and experience levels; 13 (42%) indicated they had between one and five years of experience in journalism; five (16%) had between six and ten years; four (13%) had between 11 and 15 years; four (13%) had between 16 and 20 years; and five (16%) had more than 21 years of experience.

We conducted a thematic analysis of the interviews and used exemplar quotations to illustrate and expand on the findings from the survey.



THE ROLE OF REGIONAL JOURNALISTS

Regional journalists had a distinct perception about their journalistic role in local communities. When asked in the survey 'does local/regional reporting differ from capital city journalism?', 95% of the respondents replied 'yes'.

When interviewees talked about their work in regional Australia three common themes emerged about the importance of the regional news industry: connection to community, public service and advocacy.

CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

In open-ended survey comments, 45% described regional journalism as having a 'closer connection to community' than city journalism.

“
It reflects local community's thoughts, values and issues. We're very different people and places to capital city audiences.”

“
Closer connection to community, greater importance of making sure the community sees itself in the coverage/reporting.”

“
I find that regional communities are more engaged with their local media. Changes in regional towns are noticeable, unlike in cities. Items printed in the paper are also noticed, talked about.”

Furthermore, journalists reported that working in smaller regional communities helped them to develop news gathering skills in building source relationships and establishing rapport with local citizens, activists, business owners and officials.

“There's a sense of community [...] great relationships you can build up here. Whether it's with your local mayor, whether it's your local activists, whoever it may be. At the hit of a button on my phone I can grab someone easily now, and that's been great to see.”

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Journalists saw their work as a vital public service to communities that may otherwise not be served by metropolitan news organisations. The vital importance of regional journalism as a public service was brought into stark focus this summer with the unprecedented scale of the bushfire crisis across the country. A number of journalists participating in this study, from a range of news outlets, reported from the front-line.

“At the height of the fires I was kind of disseminating information from the CFS [...] together with first hand reports from my friends and people that I know and getting background information. So, people have been saying that my updates have had more detail than the official ones, and the CFS have been very grateful as well.”

With fires in remote areas, some journalists noted that it would be difficult for metropolitan based news organisations to cover the bushfire emergency in a way that was relevant to those communities most affected by it.

“Our patch is, like I said, geographically huge. [...] and the thing is, the TVs won’t cover it because it’s too far west for them to go to meet a deadline, or to justify.”

“This fire season my journalists have been doing extraordinary hours [...] driving four-and-a-half hours to communities, to tell their stories.”

They did this to ensure reporting of the bushfires represented the perspectives of those living in affected areas and told personal stories about their circumstances.

CASE STUDY 1: STAN GORTON – THE ISLANDER, KANGAROO ISLAND

Stan Gorton is the Senior Journalist of The Islander, a newspaper that serves Kingscote and the Kangaroo Island community. He has been a regional journalist for 23 years and began his reporting career in regional Colorado in the United States of America after attending university there. In Australia, he has worked for the Port Lincoln Times and spent 12 years reporting for and editing the Narooma News.

When the bushfire crisis hit Kangaroo Island in December 2019, Gorton was the only journalist from his organisation on the Island. He was supposed to be on leave. Even though his home and family were in danger, he stayed to report on stories of community hardship, properties lost to fire, the remarkable bravery of local CFS volunteers, and the tragic loss of two lives. Not only was he filing up to five stories a day, he was helping international and national journalists who had flown in to cover his patch.

As a one-man newsroom, Gorton is the only source of local news for Kangaroo Islanders other than a community run radio station. He is the sole reporter, photographer and editor of the weekly print edition, but also manages online content and the paper’s social media presence.

Gorton admitted that the workload could be exhausting but expressed a strong commitment to informing the people of Kingscote and Kangaroo Island.

“The Islander is quite important for The Island, [...] we’re part of the community and I think people value that.”

Gorton’s story highlights the essential role that journalism plays in rural and regional communities that are often not covered by metro news organisations. It also brings into stark focus what is at stake should the industry face further cuts to staff and resources.

The community has very much rallied around Gorton and The Islander, with many taking to social media to commend his work and call for wider recognition of the important role he played in working to keep his community informed and safe during the bushfires.

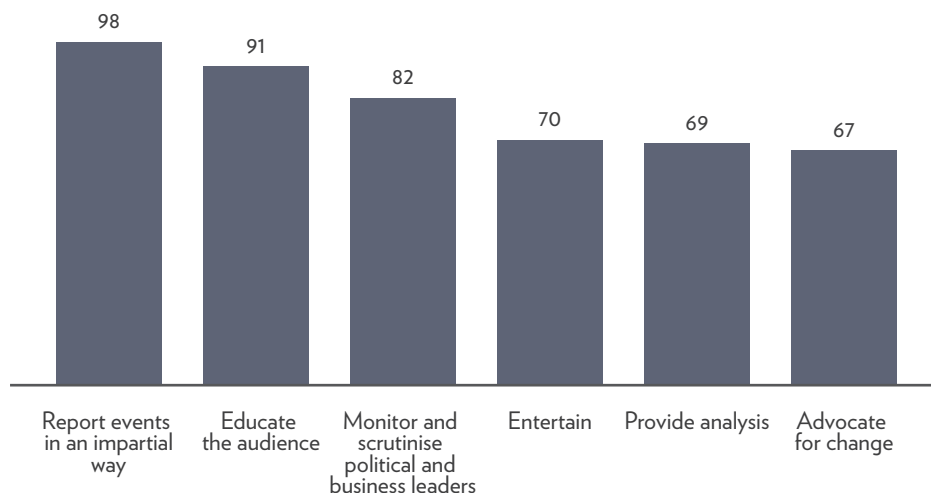
Photo courtesy of The Islander - <https://www.theislanderonline.com.au/>



IMPARTIAL REPORTING

We asked the survey participants to reflect on the different roles regional journalists play in their community. Reporting impartially on local events was seen as the key role of the majority of the journalists surveyed, followed by educating the audience and applying scrutiny to power (see Figure 1). Advocating for change in the local community ranked lower in the survey responses but featured in the interviews. Responses also varied depending on where the journalists worked and whether they were print, radio, online or TV reporters.

Figure 1 | Role of regional journalists (%)



Q. How would you describe the role of the regional/local journalist? (Select all that apply)

ADVOCATING FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

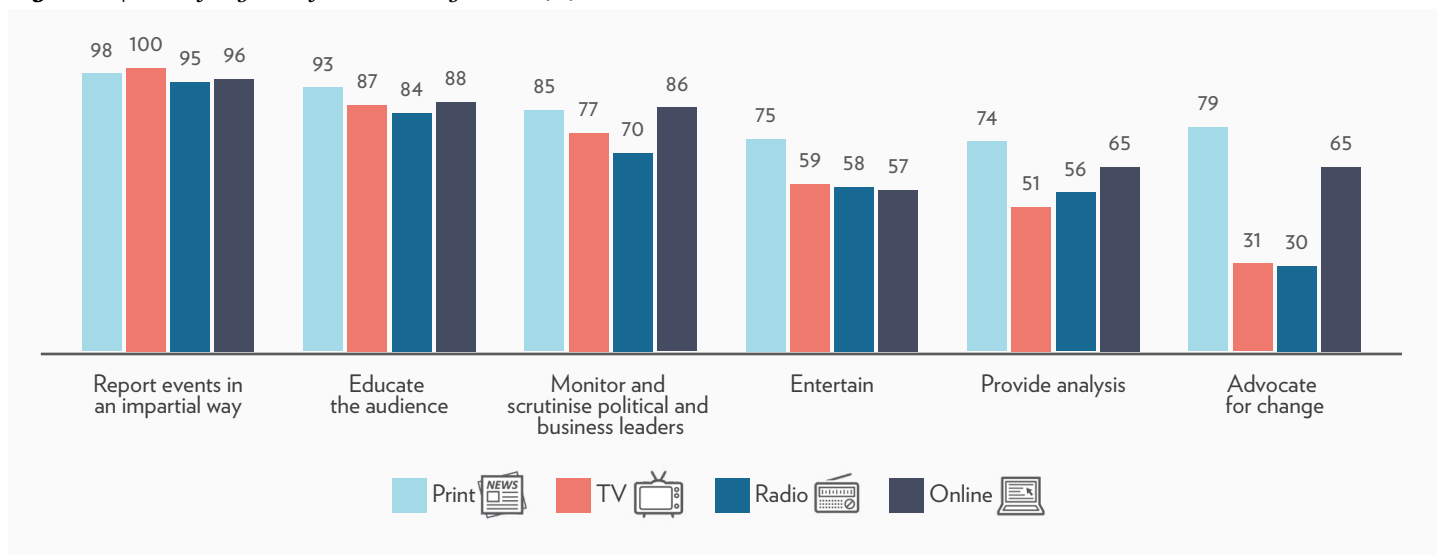
The interviews revealed that many took particular pride in the role their news organisation played in promoting the interests of people in their local region.

“We’ve broken lots of really good stories and we’ve got lots of really great results for people in our region which I think is really important.”

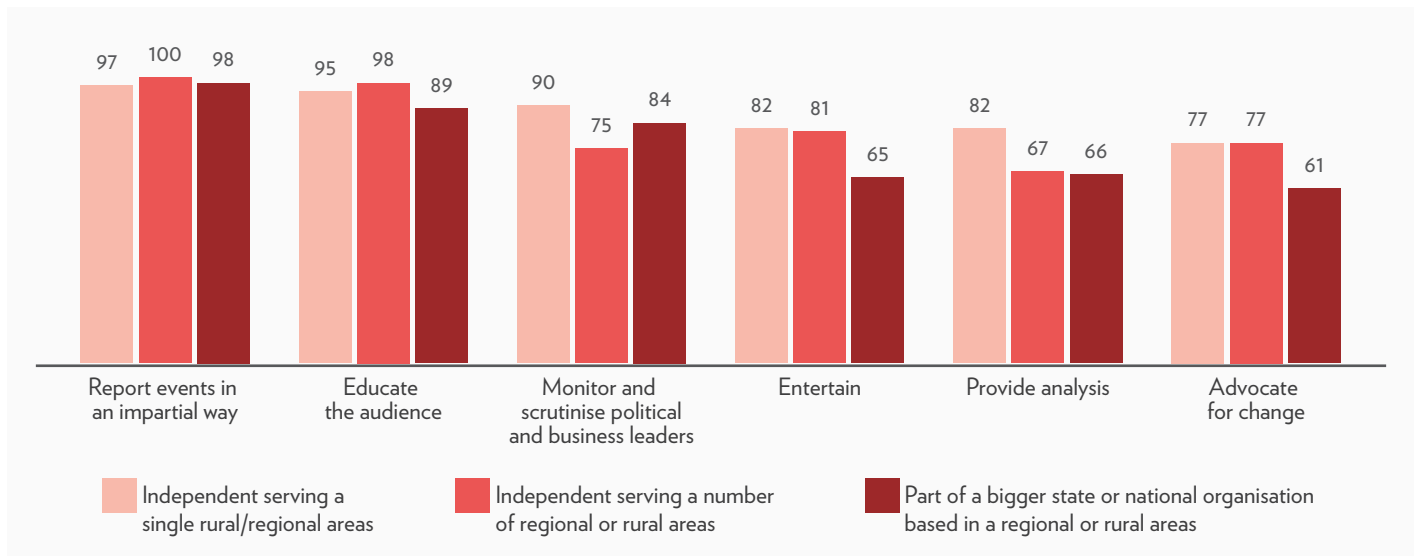
“You will maybe have a caller on-air talking about [...] a kid who has got cancer, and then you have people [saying] how can we help, we want to help, can you post a link to their GoFundMe page”.

This is particularly true of local newspaper journalists. As Figure 2 shows print and online journalists are more likely than TV and radio journalists to describe the role of regional journalists as being to advocate for change. Independent journalists are also more likely than those from a larger state or national level organisation to view the role of journalists as being to advocate for change (see Figure 3).

Figure 2 | Role of regional journalists by media (%)



Q. How would you describe the role of the regional/local journalist? (Select all that apply)

Figure 3 | Role of regional journalism by type of organisation (%)

Many interviewees reported a strong sense of personal investment in reporting on local issues. In explaining why, some journalists stated it was due to their professional and ethical obligations to serve their audience. Others expressed a sense of shared ownership of local stories, highlighting the cooperative nature of reporting in regional communities.

“People don’t think that you’re the expert that produces the news. They think they can tell you the news and help create the news. People send me photos and news tips and things all the time.”

“The community are very grateful that we’re here I think [...] when they’re happy with a story they will let us know about it as much as they will when they’re not happy.”

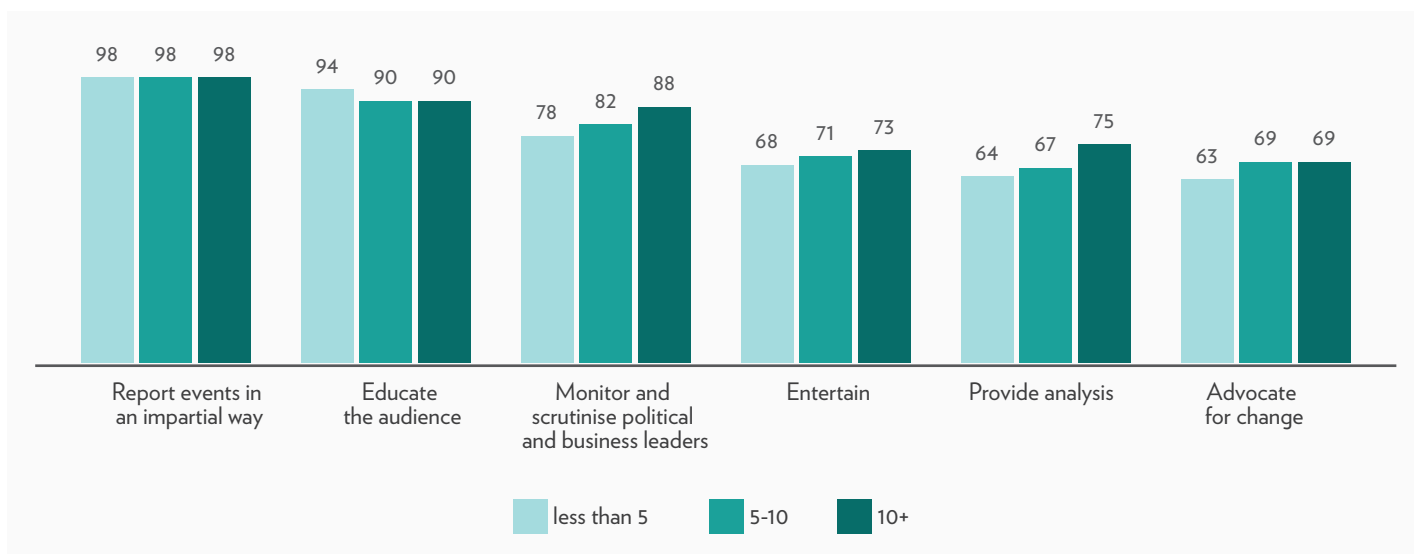
“Where we can make sure that we’re covering those real grassroots local issues [...] it was that kind of stuff that we found really engaging for the community. That was the stuff they wanted to read.”

“I was covering a local story, and a local there was just so thrilled to have me there because it meant that they were getting coverage and he [...] couldn’t help me enough [...] If they have a good relationship with you they will move heaven and earth to help you do your best.”

In general, interviewees reported that this was one of the more fulfilling aspects of working in regional areas.

Not only were there noticeable differences in role perception based on the type of news organisation and medium the reporter worked for, the survey results show clear differences based on gender and number of years of journalism experience.

More female journalists (73%) see their role as being to advocate for change in the local community compared to male journalists (58%); and journalists with more than 10 years of experience are more likely than junior and mid-career journalists to perceive holding power to account, analysis and entertainment as their key roles (see Figure 4).

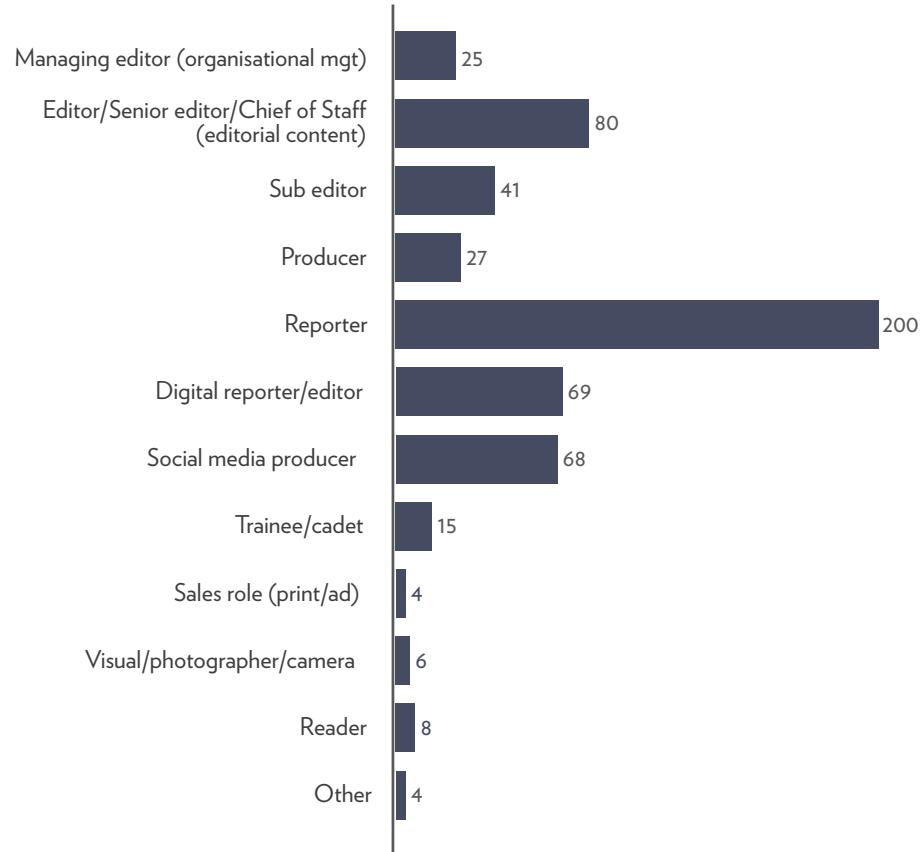
Figure 4 | Role of regional journalists by length of employment (%)

EMPLOYMENT

TYPE OF WORK

Regional journalists in contemporary Australia are multiplatform, multi-tasking reporters. We asked respondents to select all categories that best describe their current position in the organisation. As Figure 5 shows, the majority of the 307 journalists in the survey said they work as reporters in a newsroom, but it is clear that many are performing multiple roles, such as editing and social media production in addition to reporting.

Figure 5 | Position of respondents (N)



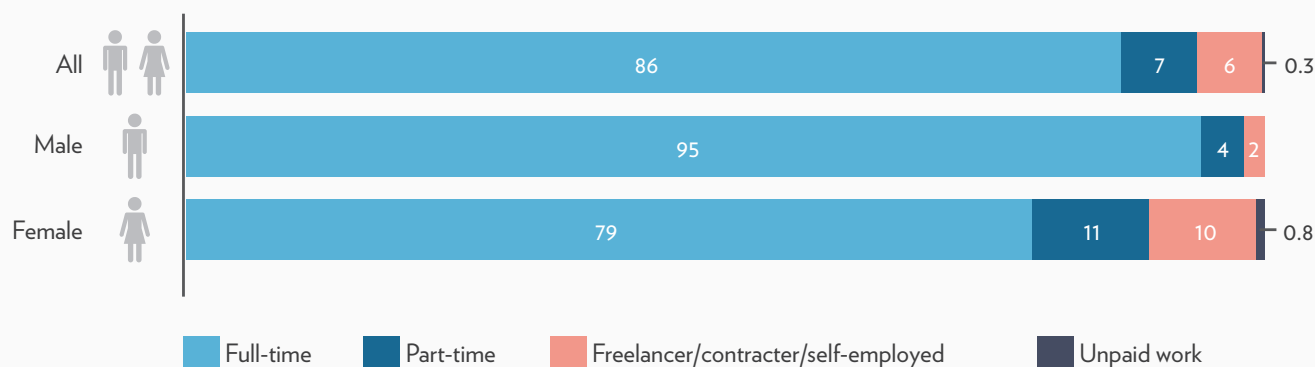
Q. Which of the following categories best describes your current position in your newsroom? (Check all that apply)

Despite the precarity of the news industry, the majority (86%) of these regional journalists who responded to the survey are employed full-time, with 14% working part-time or in a freelance capacity. Women are more likely to work part-time than men, most likely due to family commitments (see Figure 6).

Those working for independent news organisations serving one area were more likely to work part-time, than journalists working for national or state-based media organisations (92%) who were more likely to be employed full-time (see Figure 7). This likely reflects the variation in publishing frequency of local papers, such as weeklies, rather than hourly or daily publishing deadlines of larger news outlets.

Younger journalists were more likely to work for national or state-based media organisations than smaller independent outlets, which were more likely to employ older journalists with more experience (see Figure 8). There was no gender difference in employment across the different organisations.

Figure 6 | Employment by gender (%)



Q. Which of the following categories best describes your current employment? Full-time employment; Part-time employment; Freelancer/contractor; Unpaid contributor; Other.

Figure 7 | Employment by type of organisation (%)

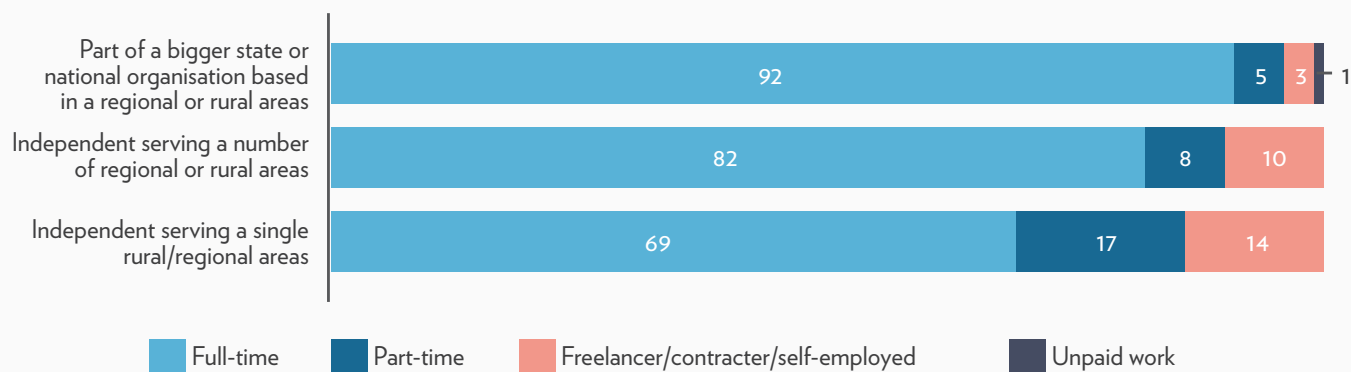
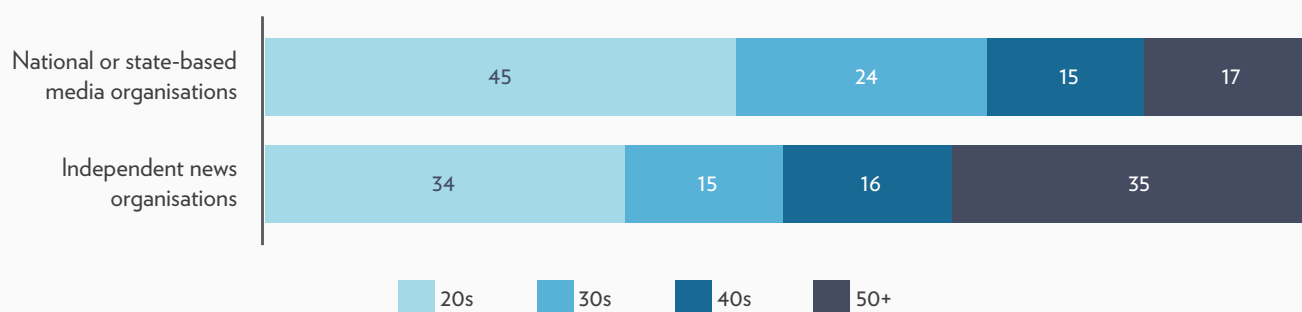


Figure 8 | Age distribution by type of organisation (%)



MOVING FOR CURRENT WORK

More than half (60%) of those surveyed said they had moved for their current job. This was particularly true for journalists in their 20s, the majority of whom (79%), had moved for their current position (see Figure 9).

This reflects the long-standing practice of journalism graduates and cadets cutting their teeth in the regions (Bowd, 2005). Interviewees frequently commented on the importance of the regions as a training ground for early career journalists seeking experience. A number of early career participants said they had planned to work in a regional area as a way to build the experience needed to apply for and attain more difficult metropolitan positions.

“There’s lots of people I’ve spoken to [...] who just say, yep, I’m just doing my two or three years, I’m getting my skills up. Because you’re forced to do everything out here, it is an excellent training ground.”

“You do just get an opportunity out of necessity to be a multi-skilled person, which we know we need anyway [...] to stay employable.”

Print journalists (52%) were less likely to have moved for their jobs compared to journalists working in other media (see Figure 10). This suggests, local community newspapers are more likely to recruit reporters from the surrounding area, whereas regional broadcasters and newer online operations look further afield to employ journalists with the relevant skills.

Journalists based in regional areas who worked for larger state or national media organisations were more likely to have moved for their jobs (65%), than those who work for independent or regional media (see Figure 11).

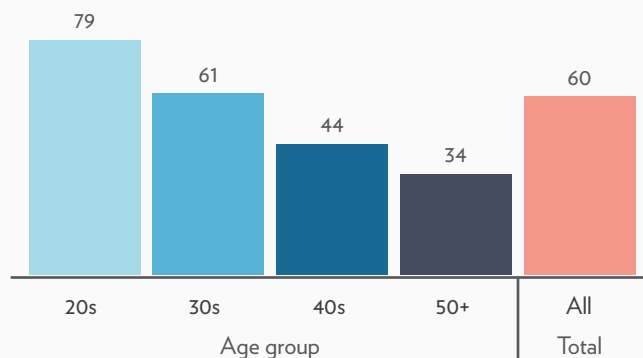
JOB SATISFACTION

Overall, the regional journalists in this study reported that they enjoyed being journalists, but said they were overworked and underpaid, with many facing mental health issues due to stress and being overworked. The data shows significant differences across media platforms, organisation type, and levels of experience.

We asked regional journalists how satisfied they were in various aspects of their job; pay, job security, the work itself, the hours they work, the flexibility available to balance work and non-work commitments, and the overall satisfaction with their job. On average, these regional journalists were most satisfied with the ‘work itself’ (4.13), and the overall satisfaction is high with an average of 3.76 points. They were less satisfied with pay (2.69) and work hours (3.22) (see Figure 12).

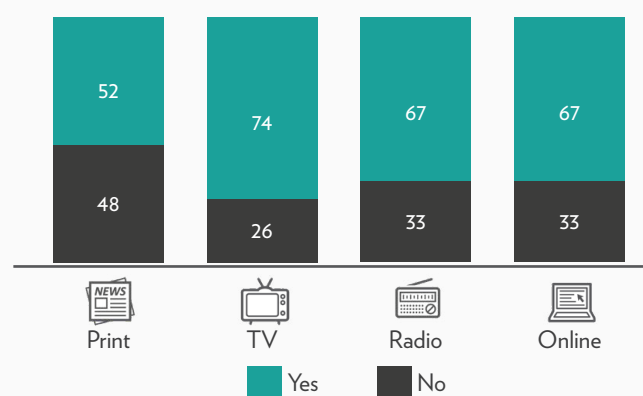
There were no gender differences in job satisfaction. However, the age of the journalist is an important factor. Younger journalists were less likely to be satisfied with the job overall, working hours and job flexibility, compared to older journalists (see Figure 13).

Figure 9 | Moved for current job by age group (%)



Q. Did you move to your town/city for your current journalism job? (“Yes” responses)

Figure 10 | Moved for current job by medium (%)



Q. Did you move to your town/city for your current journalism job?

Figure 11 | Moved for current job by type of organisation (%)

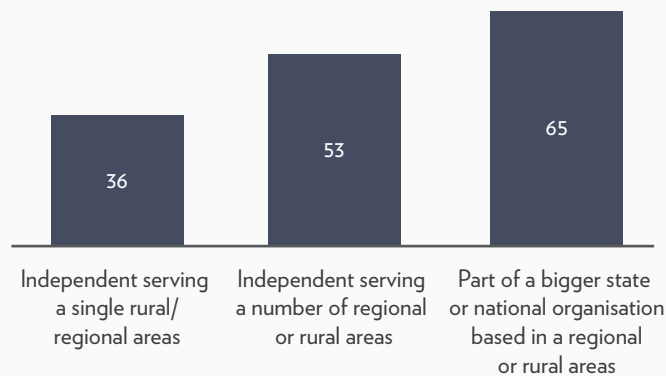
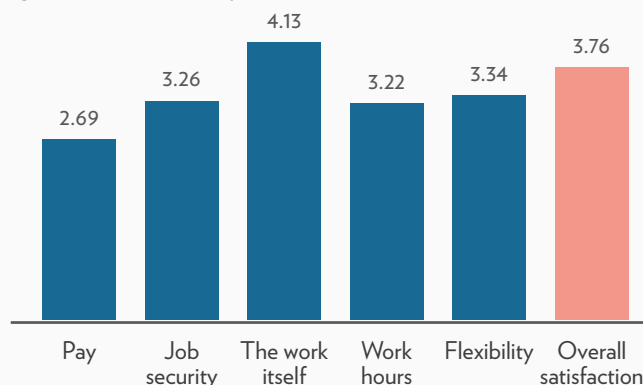


Figure 12 | Job satisfaction



Q. How satisfied are you with the following? (5-point scale)

Similarly, junior staff were less likely to be satisfied with job flexibility compared to those who have more journalism experience (see Figure 14). However, it was the mid-career journalists who were the least satisfied overall.

Journalists who worked for a larger national or state organisation were less likely to be satisfied with their job compared to those who worked for independent or regional organisations (see Figure 15).

Figure 13 | Job satisfaction by age group

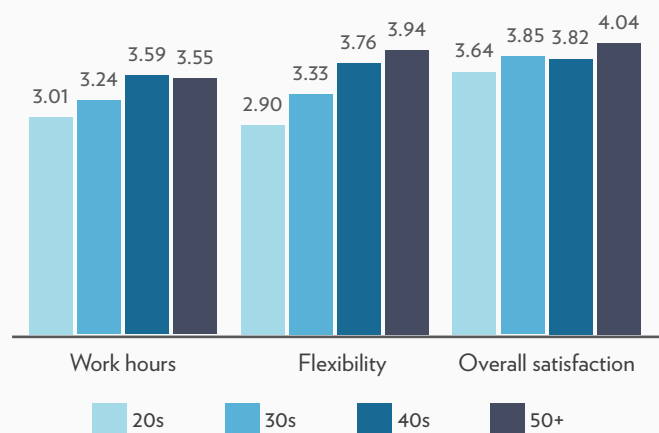
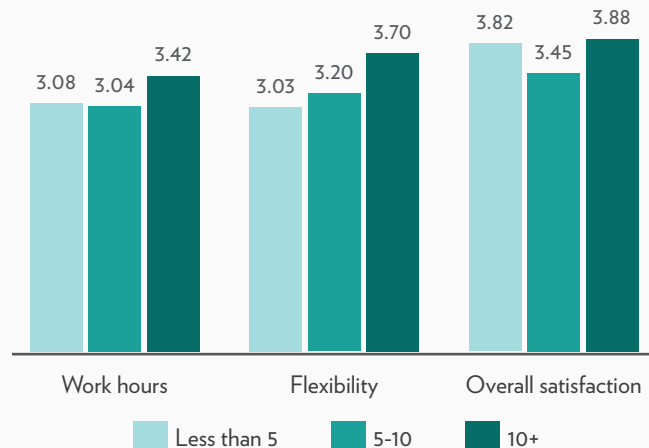


Figure 14 | Job satisfaction by length of employment



Regional TV journalists were significantly less satisfied with their work hours and job flexibility, whereas print journalists were more likely to be satisfied with job security, work hours, and job flexibility (see Figure 16).

Figure 15 | Job satisfaction by type of organisation

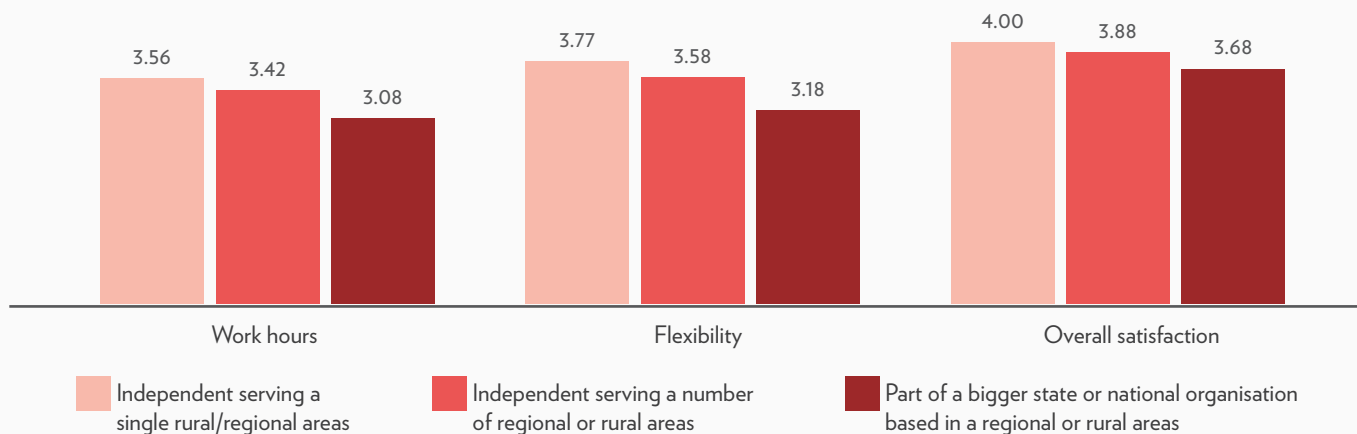
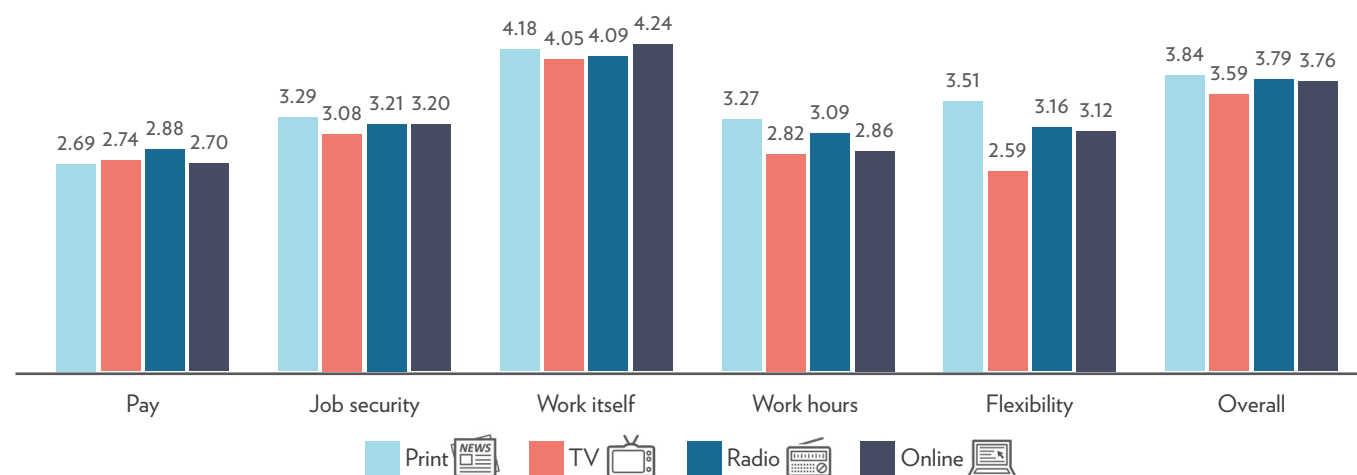


Figure 16 | Job satisfaction by media



OVERWORKED & UNDERPAID

In the survey, satisfaction with pay was the lowest among all job satisfaction categories. The work itself was why journalists were in the job rather than for the remuneration. Interview participants repeatedly raised that regional journalists viewed themselves as underpaid and overworked due to a lack of resources.

Many interviewees reported that their newsrooms were limited in staff and other resources for producing news. Consequently, regional journalists were likely to be required to undertake a wide variety of news production tasks that may previously have been divided between two or more roles. Some reported that they had received additional workloads as a consequence of digital news and social media use, but this had not coincided with an increase in resources or staff.

Newspaper journalists often reported that there was increased pressure for them to produce audio-visual content for websites and social media posts. Television journalists were more likely to report that they were required to fulfil both reporting and videography roles as video-journalists (VJs). While this provides positive opportunities for multi-skilling, it significantly increases workloads for individual journalists.

“We get sent out to VJ stories and when you VJ you’re also expected to be filing online and radio, which is just a mammoth task”.

“In theory, we’re supposed to be writing six to eight stories a day. Well we can barely make a phone call to do all that, so that for me is the major one, this obsession with churn.”

While community demand for news had not decreased, their capacity to deliver that news had.

“[...] we print every day other than Sundays [with] four and a half journos. When we first started, we had 14 in the general news team and three in the sports department”.

“My newsroom is two people [...] so we regularly do a 32 to 42-page paper between two journalists.”

“Seven deadlines in four days. As the only sports journalist for the area.”

“We had to do the same amount of workload that double the staff were doing, previous to my employment.”

In addition to feeling overworked, many regional journalists said they felt they were being underpaid relative to their workload or were not being paid for the hours they worked overtime. Some reported receiving time off work in lieu of overtime, but also noted that with staff levels low it was sometimes impossible to take time off.

“None of us were being paid overtime in a sense to cover bushfires, we were just doing it because we felt we had a responsibility.”

“So, I did 75 hours in eight days [...] so I accumulated 35 hours of TOIL in a week. [...] But at the same time, it’s pretty hard to take that because we only have a two-person team.”

“My camera operator and I refused to film [the event] because we just thought that is essentially like five hours of unpaid overtime which we wouldn’t even get back in time in lieu.”

Compared to journalists working for independent news organisations, those working for large news organisations were more likely to report concerns about underpayment, under-resourcing, and cuts to journalism budgets.

“They just need to stop cutting it. They need to stop cutting regional budgets. They need to put the money back in because we’re suffering, and I wouldn’t be surprised if our newsroom got cut in maybe two and a half-years’ time.”

In contrast, journalists working for independent news organisations reported similar feelings of being underpaid and overworked, but were generally more positive about the future of their news organisation, and its place in the community.

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Overwork was strongly associated by many regional journalists with stress, feelings of isolation, and poor mental health outcomes, particularly for those in their early career. For those working in remote newsrooms there was some discussion of the need for additional mental health services that could be made available to those who wanted them.

“Mentally, it was fairly draining and I just made the decision that I needed to get away from the 24-hour news cycle and step out of that world for a while.”

“It’s exhaustion. More so than anything else [...] so the anxiety levels are very high. They were sort of massive when I first started, because I was very nervous.”

Many journalists interviewed for this research stated that burnout, stress and anxiety, were major factors they considered when thinking about their future working as a regional journalist. A number of interviewees stated that they would likely leave the profession because of the psychological impact of their work.

“I would love to stay here and become the editor [...] but unfortunately I have to probably prioritise my mental health before I would make that decision.”

“Within the next five to 10 years I can see myself still working in journalism but beyond that I actually probably don’t see myself still doing it. I think I will get burnt out”.

Social media presented problems for many regional journalists as well, with some stating that the push towards 24-hour news has contributed to poorer work life balance.

“When you’re running your own Facebook page, you’re living it 24-hours a day seven days a week [...] so they’re sending you story ideas, you’re fully engulfed in the news cycle.”

Overall, mental health was a significant concern for those interviewed in this study. A number of participants called for more resources to be made available to support journalists at risk of burnout and anxiety, those reporting on traumatising subject matter, and those dealing with hostile and stressful social media engagement.

CASE STUDY 2: MOLLIE GORMAN – ABC RIVERINA



Mollie Gorman is a recent Charles Sturt University graduate and a reporter for ABC Riverina. She has worked as a cadet for National Radio News, Bathurst, and interned at ABC Radio Orange before finding her way to Wagga Wagga.

During her studies, Gorman was accepted to undertake an internship with news organisation Grupo Média Nacional in Timor-Leste which was funded in part by the New Colombo Plan.

Gorman has reported on an impressive range of topics, covering everything from community events and environmental issues, to stories of everyday life in regional New South Wales. Her reporting on an incident of vandalism at Gundagai’s Dog on the Tucker Box statue has gained her national attention.

In January of this year, Gorman was called to the fire fronts to report on scenes of devastation at the Dunn’s Road Fire near Batlow and the Green Valley-Talmalmo Fire. Alongside her ABC colleagues, a number of whom had been recalled from leave and maternity leave, Gorman filed stories from the field for ABC television and radio, contributed to online articles, and published on social media. Despite having no training or experience in emergency broadcasting, she worked for almost a month covering the fires as they torched

over 500,000 hectares of land and tragically claimed the life of RFS volunteer firefighter Samuel McPaul.

Speaking about her role as a regional journalist, Gorman told the research team that she was optimistic and threw herself into her work but was concerned about the possibility of burning out. She spoke about the challenges of long hours, limited resources, and travel requirements. Her organisation provides news to almost 300,000 people spread across the vast distances between Hay, Albury, Tumut and Cowra.

Photograph taken by Greg Findlay

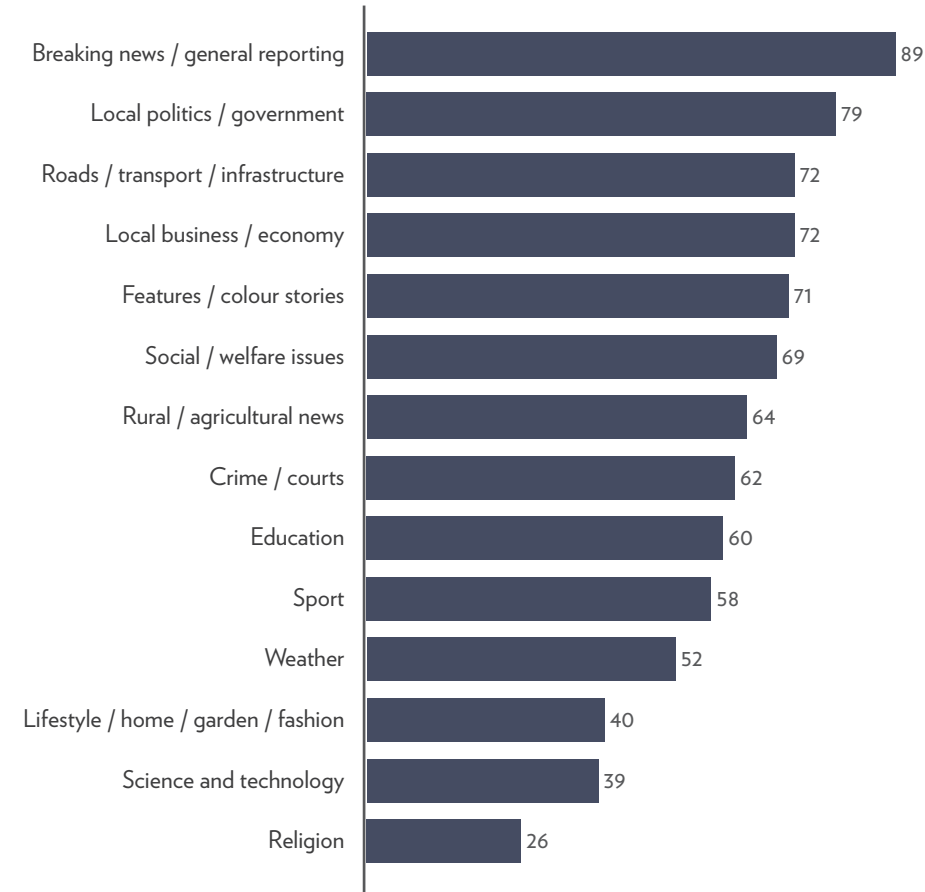


PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Not only do regional journalists perform multiple roles, they are also responsible for covering a wide range of issues from breaking news to religion and weather. Almost 90% said they were responsible for breaking news/general reporting, and 79% said they covered local politics/government (see Figure 17).

Figure 17 | Topics of reporting (%)



Q. About which of the following topics are you frequently responsible for producing or editing content? (Select all that apply)

Despite the variety of reporting areas covered by regional journalists, there was a significant gender difference in reporting responsibilities. For instance, 60% of female journalists in the study said they were responsible for reporting weather compared to 38% of male journalists. The gender gap is most prominent in topics such as social issues, rural news, education and crime/courts, where female journalists are more likely to cover these topics (see Figure 18).

A generation gap was also found in the topics covered. The proportion of journalists reporting on features, social issues and sport, was higher among journalists aged 50+. In contrast, younger journalists were more likely to cover crime/courts (see Figure 19).

Mid-career journalists with 5-10 years' experience were the least likely to be responsible for lifestyle reporting and more likely to cover hard news. Junior journalists were more likely to report on rural/agricultural news than senior journalists (see Figure 20).

Figure 18 | Topics by gender (%)

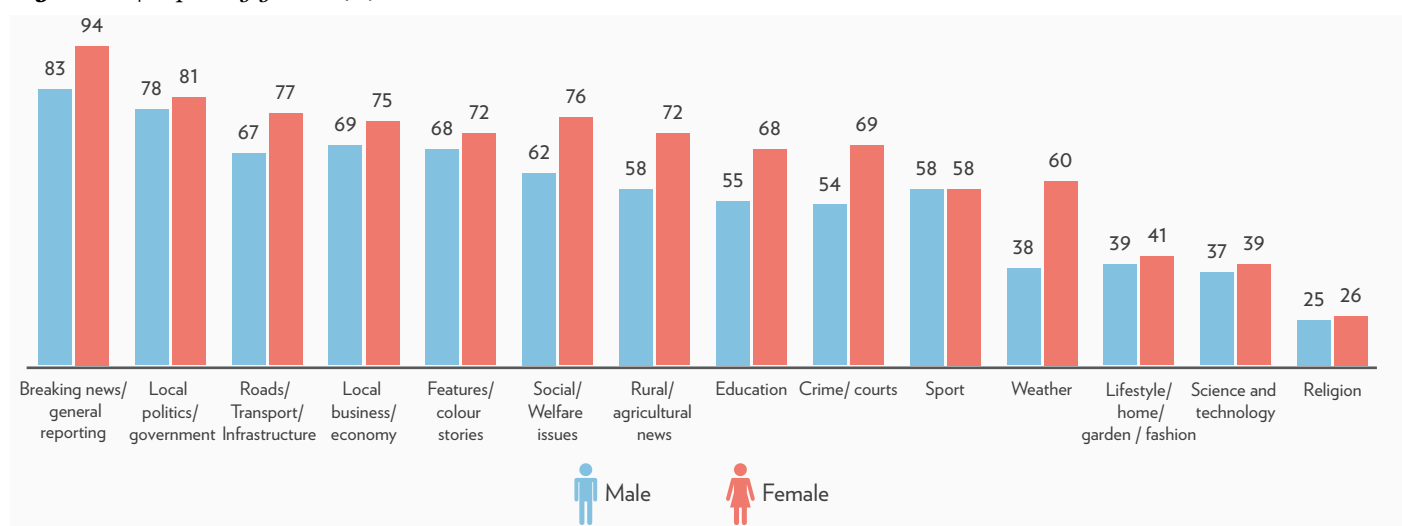


Figure 19 | Topics by age group (%)

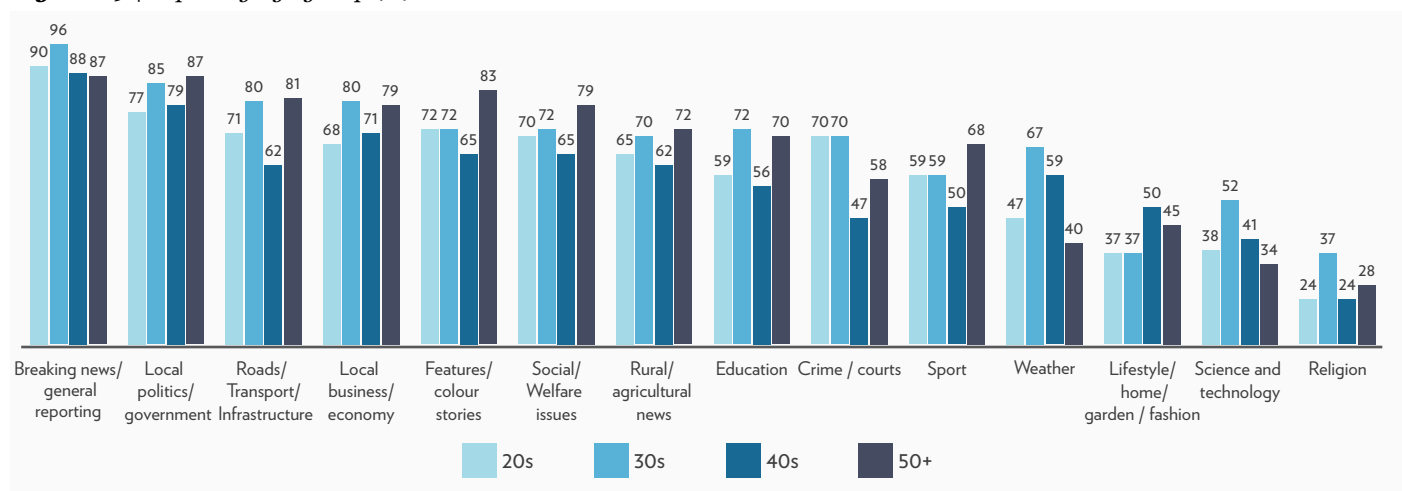
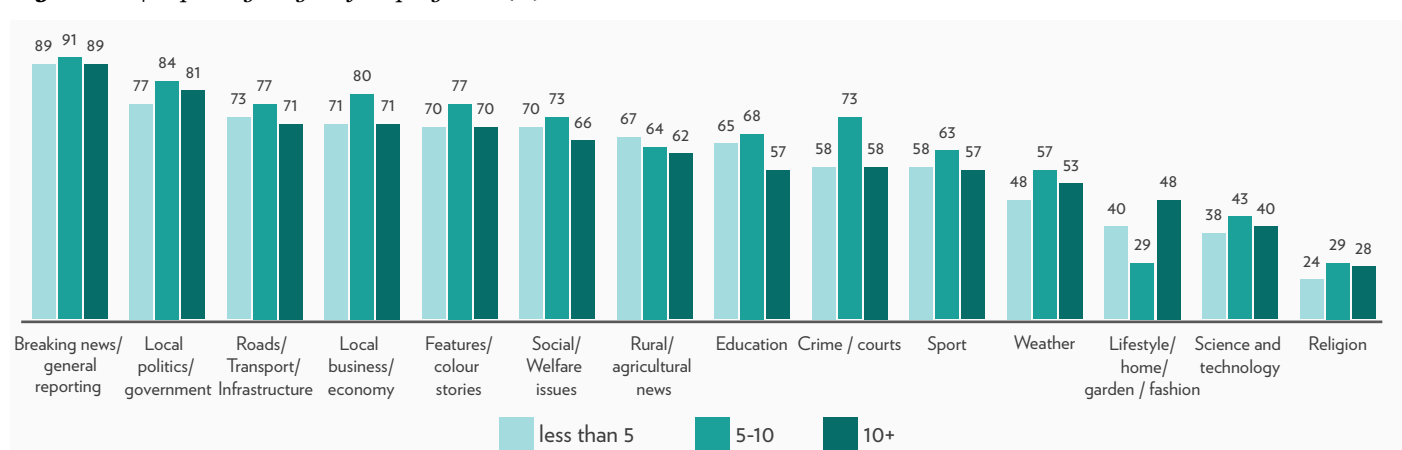


Figure 20 | Topics by length of employment (%)



A significantly higher proportion of regional TV journalists report crime (80%) and sport (73%) stories compared to other media journalists. Radio journalists report more on weather (76%), science (57%) and rural news (76%) compared to other media journalists (see Figure 21).

These differences were further reflected between independent local and larger network news outlets. Journalists who worked for independent

regional media organisations were more likely to be responsible for a range of topics, including local politics, local business and rural news, compared to journalists in large state or national media organisations who were more likely to cover weather (57%) and crime news (67%) (see Figure 22). Again, this shows greater coverage of the issues impacting on these local communities by smaller independent news outlets, compared to larger networked news outlets that serve the region.

Figure 21 | Topics by media (%)

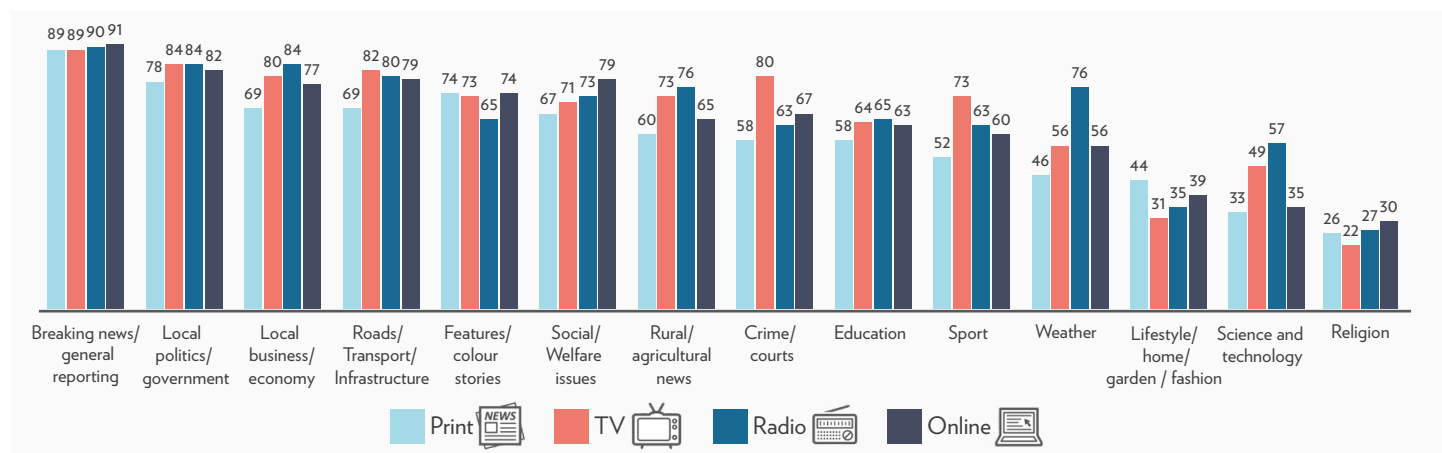
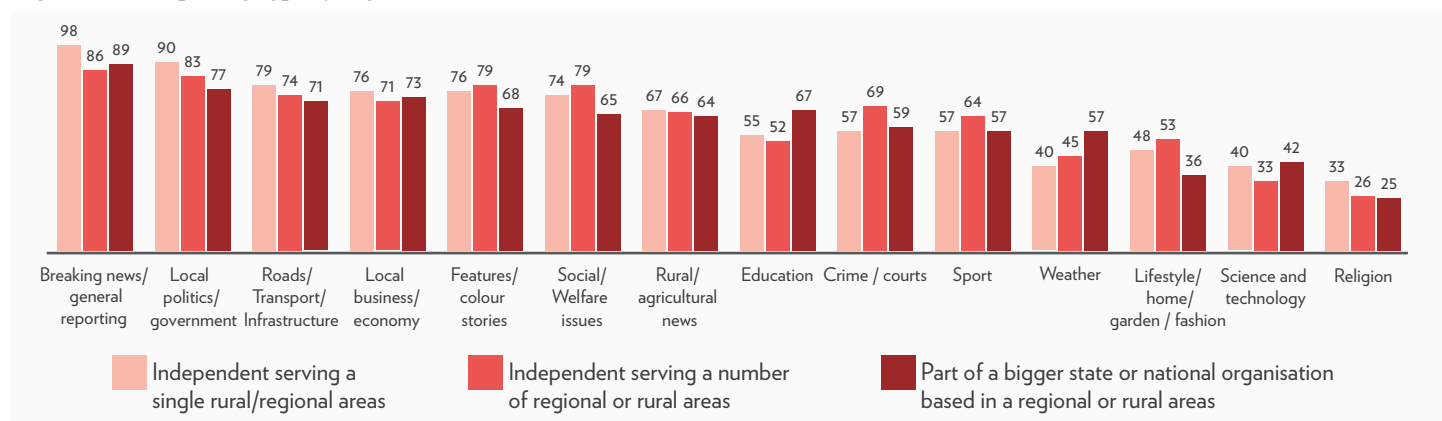


Figure 22 | Topics by type of organisation (%)



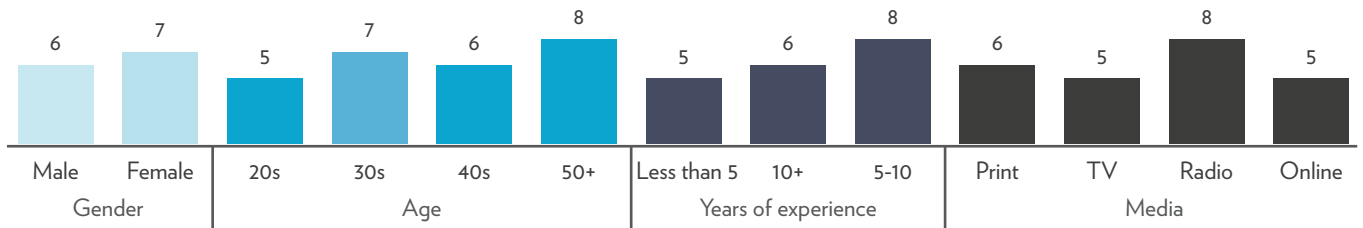
TIME SPENT ON REPORTING

Given the impact of social media on journalism globally, respondents were asked about the amount of time they spent doing journalism – researching, creating and publishing stories – compared to the amount of time they spend online keeping up to date, and on social media promoting their stories and moderating audience comments.

On average, these regional journalists said they produced or edited six stories a day. Journalists aged 50+ produce more news stories than younger journalists. The median number of stories that regional journalists produce

in a day is five, and 75% of regional journalists produce seven or less stories a day. However, 7% (21 respondents) produce 20 or more stories a day.

While female journalists were slightly more likely to produce more stories than male journalists, the difference was not significant. Senior journalists with more than ten years' experience produced more than junior journalists. Radio journalists produced a larger number of stories in a day compared to journalists in other media (see Figure 23).

Figure 23 | Average number of stories per day

Q. On average, how many items do you produce and/or edit on a usual day?

We asked how much time they spent on one story. Respondents spent an average of 2 hours and 12 minutes a day dedicated to researching and producing a story.

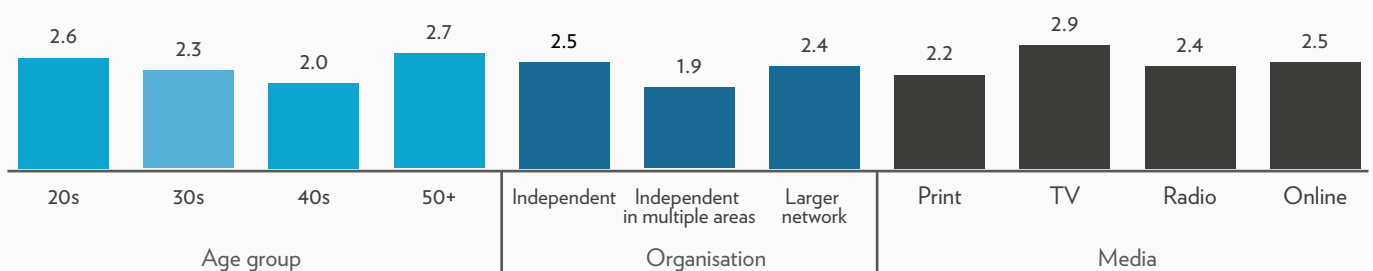
Journalists aged 50+ spent more time (2 hours and 42 minutes) researching and producing stories compared to younger journalists. Journalists in their 40s spent the least amount of time (2 hours).

There were no significant differences in the amount of time spent on researching and producing stories between journalists who work for independent or regional media organisations, and larger state or national media organisations.

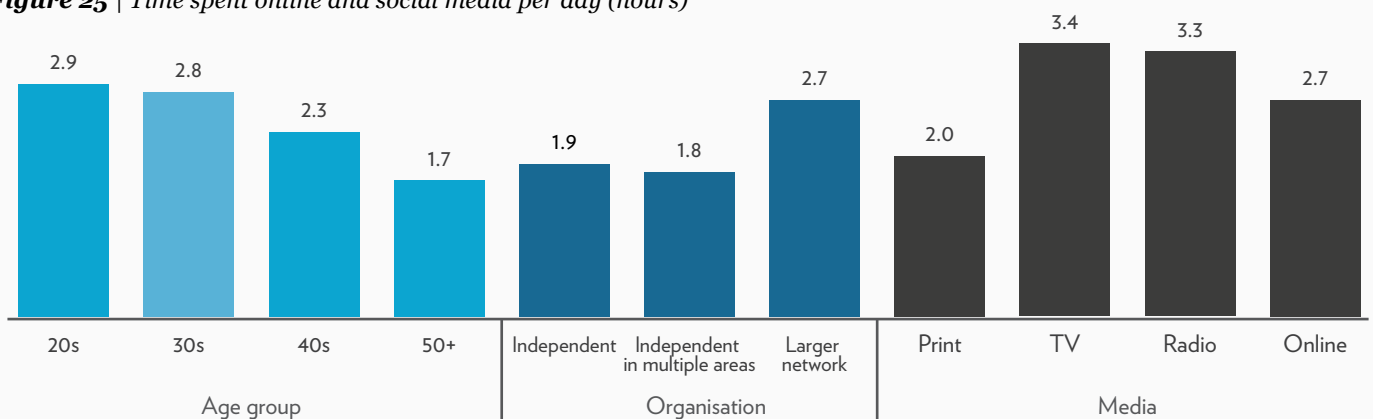
Overall, TV journalists spent significantly more time working on one story compared to journalists in other media. On average, they spent 2 hours and 54 minutes on researching and producing one story. Radio journalists spent 2 hours and 24 minutes on producing a story. Print journalists spent the least amount of time online and producing stories compared to other media journalists (see Figure 24).

We then asked how much time journalists spent on staying up-to-date online and promoting their stories via social media on an average day. Respondents spent on average of 2 hours and 18 minutes on staying up to date online and promoting stories via social media. Those with more experience and working for print and independent media organisations, spend significantly less time keeping up-to-date online and marketing their stories on social media.

Younger journalists spent significantly more time online and on social media promoting stories and keeping up to date with what is happening. There were differences in the amount of time spent online staying up-to-date and promoting stories. Those who work for large state or national media organisations spent significantly more time online (2 hours and 42 minutes), than those who work for independent media organisations (1 hour and 54 minutes). TV journalists spent 3 hours and 24 minutes using online and social media to keep up-to-date and promote their stories. Radio journalists spent the most time seeking information and promoting stories online (3 hours and 18 minutes) (see Figure 25).

Figure 24 | Time spent on producing one story (hours)

Q. How much of your time do you spend researching and producing a typical story each day?

Figure 25 | Time spent online and social media per day (hours)

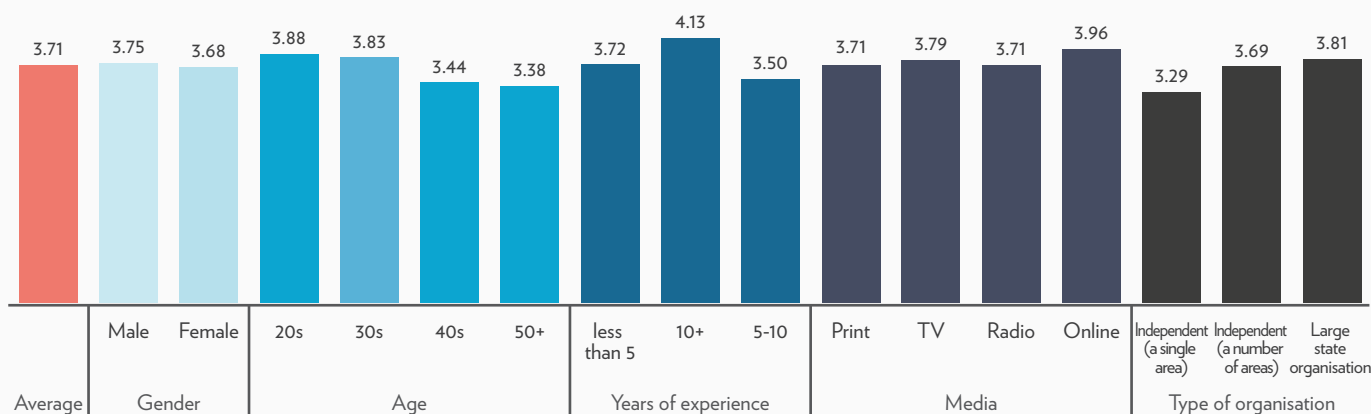
Q. How much of your time do you spend each day online, marketing (i.e. social media) your stories and keeping up to date with what is happening?

CONFIDENCE IN USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

We asked regional journalists how confident they were in using digital technology and tools on a 5-point scale (not at all confident (1) to extremely confident (5)). The majority of the respondents (75%) reported some level of confidence (somewhat/very/extremely); almost half of the respondents (48%) were very/extremely confident in using digital technology.

There was little difference between male and female journalists, but there were slightly higher levels of confidence found among males. Younger journalists had significantly higher levels of confidence compared to older journalists. Mid-career journalists with 5-10 years' experience (4.13) were more confident in technology use compared to junior (3.72) and senior journalists (3.50). Online journalists had higher levels of digital confidence (3.96) than other journalists. Large state or national media Journalists had higher levels of digital confidence (3.81) than independent media journalists (see Figure 26).

Figure 26 | Levels of digital confidence



Q. How confident are you in using digital technology and tools in your work? (5-point scale)

MIXED VIEWS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Regional journalists expressed mixed sentiments about the role of social media in their work. Almost all acknowledged that for better or worse social media was changing the nature of what they do. For interviewees, social media presented both challenges and opportunities for producing regional news. Generally, they reported that social media had potential benefits, but it could be a burden in newsrooms stretched for time and resources. Others expressed discomfort at using social media as a source of news, viewing it as potentially misleading and unreliable.

Early-career journalists and those working for larger media organisations were more likely to report that social media was a significant feature of their work. Conversely, journalists with many years of experience and those working at independent newspapers were less inclined to use social media to report on or gather news. This is related to the factor that digital confidence is lower among older generations in general. This is broadly reflected in the quantitative findings for this research around confidence in social media use as well as time spent online and social media for work.

For veteran journalists this was not always attributed to a lack of training or experience with social media. Many stated they believed social media was simply not as relevant to their work in regional communities, or for that matter, to their audience.

"Obviously we get some things from social media. Not as much as you might think. [...] I rarely break any stories that are of any value out of social media. It usually tends to be just hard work on the ground."

"I know it's definitely there. I just don't think of it as my primary source. [...] It's usually when I've exhausted other avenues."

"Facebook is really only a small audience. Worldwide it's a large audience but around here we find people are still reading the paper."

Particularly in rural and remote news organisations, journalists reported that their smaller and generally older audience was less active on social media, and that as an avenue for gathering news it produced mixed results. The perception of an older audience, more dependent on traditional news media platforms, is supported by the Digital News Report: Australia. A number of interviewees expressed uncertainty about how their news organisation would adapt as their primary audience continue to age and the region's population is declining.

For some, the extra labour required to monitor social media and moderate comments on news posts was not worth the reportedly small increase in audience reach because it took them away from their journalistic work.

"I personally hate the job as much as it is a requirement for me to be looking after social media and understand social media, if it were up to me, I would focus on the reporting."

"Sometimes we have to spend hours moderating, which is incredibly frustrating 'cause I could be doing so many other things."

Their need to prioritise work within limited resources was the main factor in these decisions. They also reported that dealing with inappropriate, hostile, or defamatory comments on organisational social media pages was a significant cause of anxiety.

“I think it’s worthwhile anyone who works in social media probably doing some training around mental health first aid [...] you see comments and you’re moderating comments all day and reading horrible stories [...] it can be very draining mentally.”

Despite these issues, social media was also seen to offer distinct benefits. It allowed them to reach a generally younger audience and maintain connections with remote members of the community. It also provided a channel for locals to provide leads on stories, develop sources and find information about events in the community.

“I constantly find talent [on social media], sometimes the only way I can get onto a talent is direct messaging them on Instagram.”

“It’s also a good way to reach out and see if anybody was there at the time of an incident, or somebody who has commented or something like that, to get that raw eyewitness account.”

Some interviewees stated that social media was a useful source of content provided by members of the community, including photos, videos, and background information. For journalists who used social media more, they appreciated the ability to quickly source content and immediately present news to audiences in their area.

Among regional journalists there was acknowledgement that younger journalists were more often given additional work responsibilities related to social media. As such, early career journalists tended to see social media as a central part of their role as a journalist.

“As a young person, I feel like we need to spend a lot more time on social media [...] but I know within [the organisation] there’s a lot of backlash among, I think, a lot of older journalists who don’t appreciate the role of it.”

Some interviewees also stated they were proactive in using social media and digital news analytics to better develop a profile and understanding of their audience. Those who already used data and analytics were more likely to express interest in further training that might help them tailor their news output.

In general, regional journalists tended to perceive social media as a useful tool for actively monitoring, participating in, and connecting with their community. However, many were hesitant about using social media as a platform for news. Among the journalists interviewed, a number stated the aim of their social media use was to draw audience members towards their print, online, or broadcast content.

“We constantly try and push people off the Facebook platform by putting up links and getting them to click the link.”

“What we do is, we tease and promote our news on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram [...] but the end game, and the end goal for any network to survive, needs to be that remote control switching to that channel at our time.”



TRAINING AND SKILLS

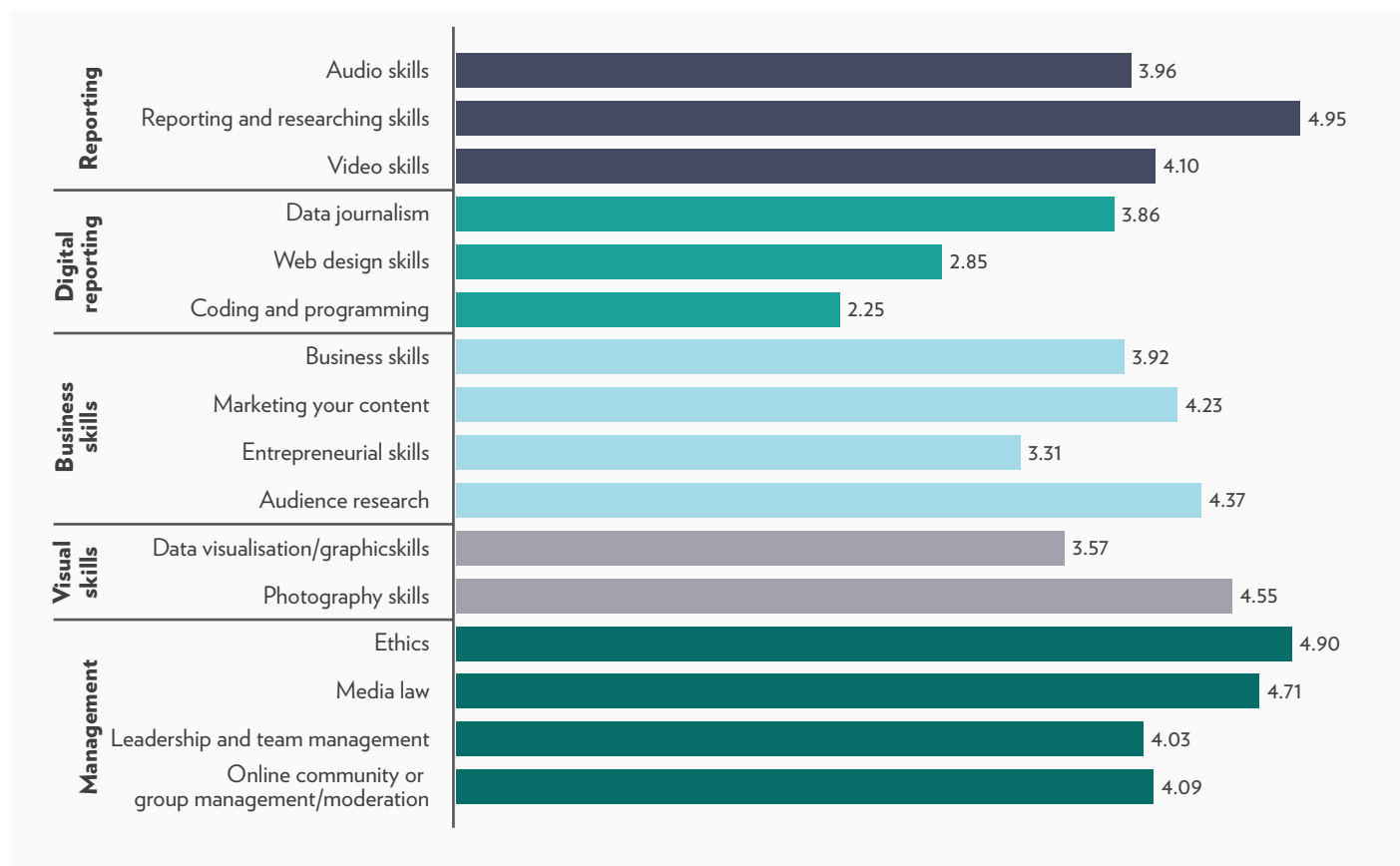
A central aim of this study was to find out what regional journalists themselves need. The majority of participants had a Bachelor's degree or higher (80%) and 78% had a journalism or communication related degree. Forty-two percent had 10+ years experience working as a journalist, 17% had 5-10 years experience, and 39% had worked as a reporter for less than 5 years.

While there have been government and industry programmes developed to assist regional journalism, the voices of practitioners have been missing from the debate. We asked a range of detailed questions about the skills regional journalists think are important and what areas they need help in. Despite broader debates about the need for innovation and technology-based solutions, much of the need expressed by reporters in the field was for training in basic journalism skills, media law and court reporting, rather than in social media and digital technology.

IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR A REGIONAL REPORTER

We asked regional journalists what skills were important for regional journalism on a 5-point scale (not at all important (1) to very important (5)). Overall digital reporting skills were regarded as less important than traditional reporting skills. Basic reporting skills and management skills were perceived to be more important. Highly ranked skills included: Reporting and researching skills (4.95), Ethics (4.9), Media law (4.71), Photography skills (4.55), Audience research (4.37), Marketing your content (4.23), Video skills (4.1), Online community or group management (4.09), and Leadership and team management (4.03) (see Figure 27).

Figure 27 | Important skills for regional journalists



Q. How important do you think each of the following skills is for a regional reporter today? For each, please rate from very important to not important at all (5-point scale).

There were no significant differences between age groups, however, journalists in their 30's regarded data visualisation/graphic skills and media law to be more important than any other age group (see Figure 28).

There were significant differences in the perception of important skills between the type of organisation. Regional journalists employed by large state or national media perceived technical skills such as audio and video skills to be more important than regional journalists working for independent media. Entrepreneurial and business skills were regarded as more important among independent media journalists than those employed by large state or national media outlets (see Figure 29).

Figure 28 | Important skills by age group

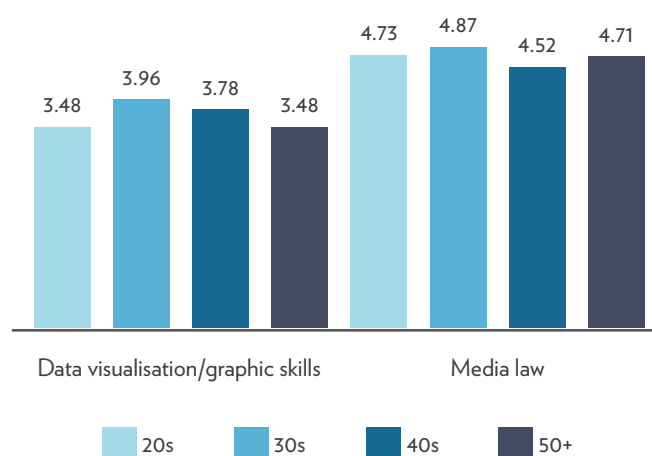
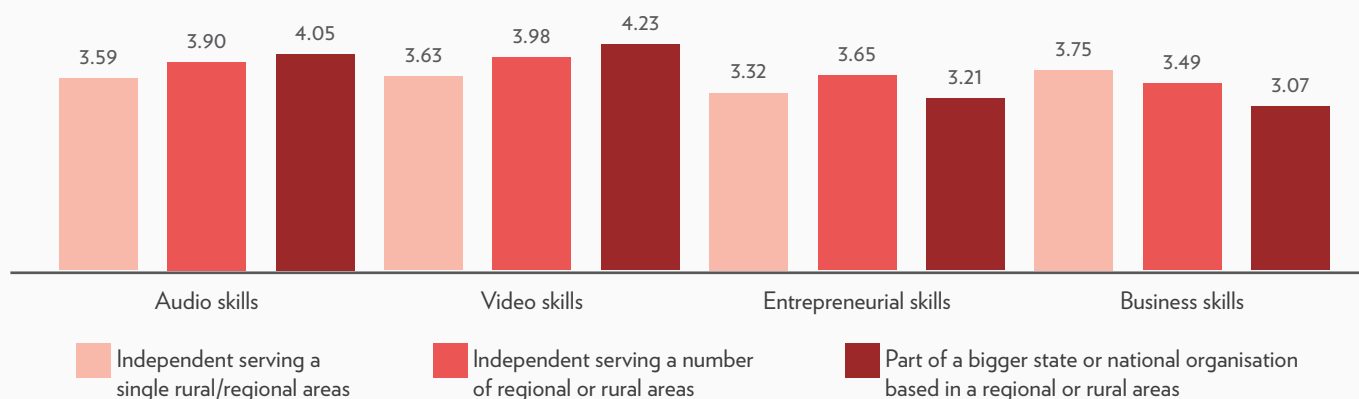


Figure 29 | Important skills by type of organisation



Digital reporting, business skills, and visual skills, were regarded as more important among print and online journalists, compared to TV and radio journalists. TV and radio journalists considered general reporting skills to be more important compared to print and online journalists. Management skills were seen as equally important by journalists of all media types (see Figure 30). These results reflect the areas in which reporters deemed their skills were weakest across the different media platforms.

About 63% of regional journalists said they received training in the past year. However, those who had been working longer tended to receive less training (see Figure 31).

Figure 30 | Important skills by media

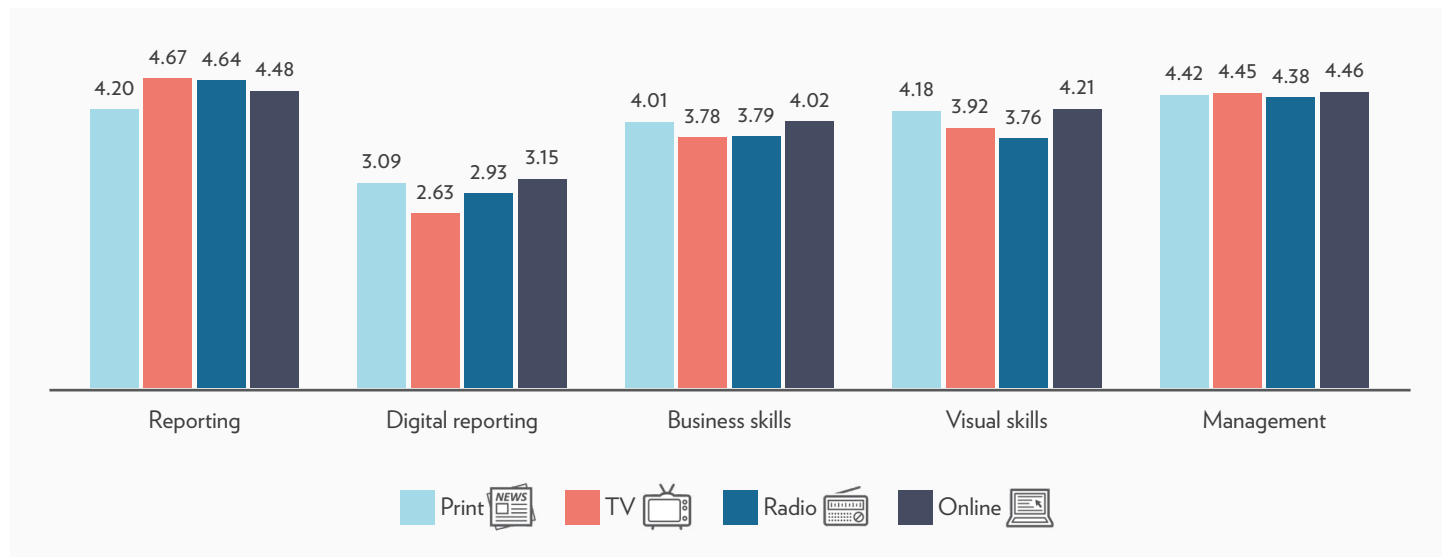
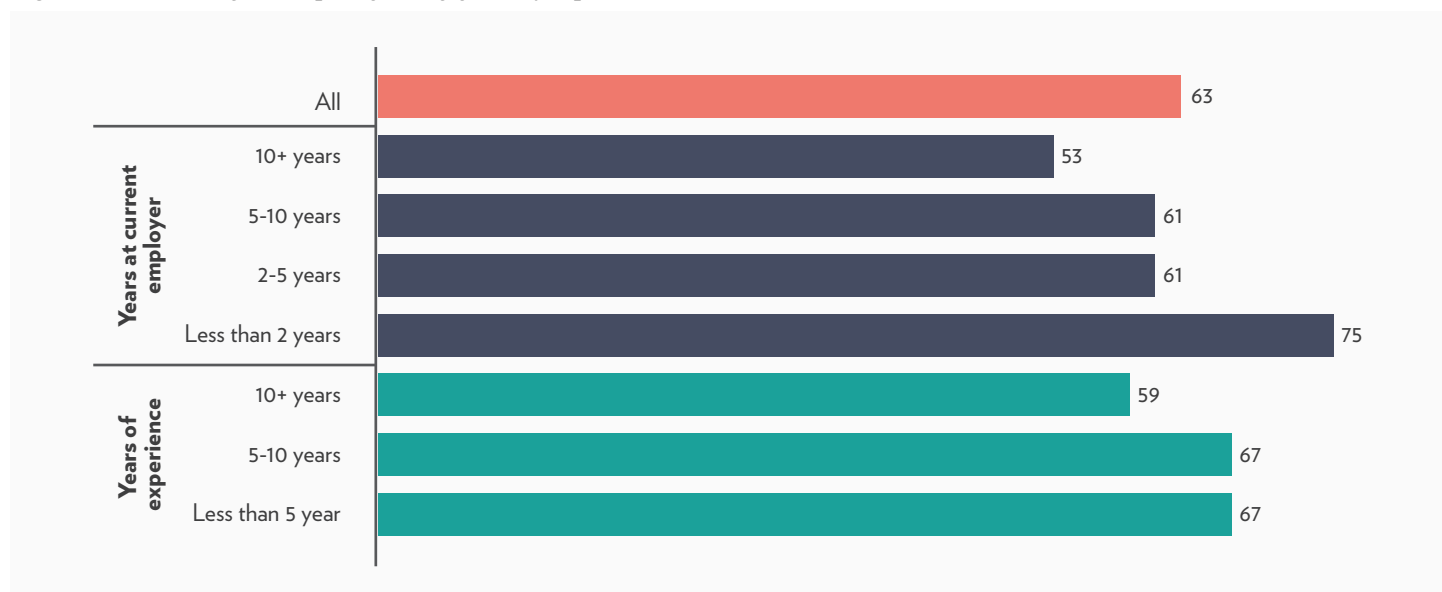


Figure 31 | Training in the past year by years of experience (%)

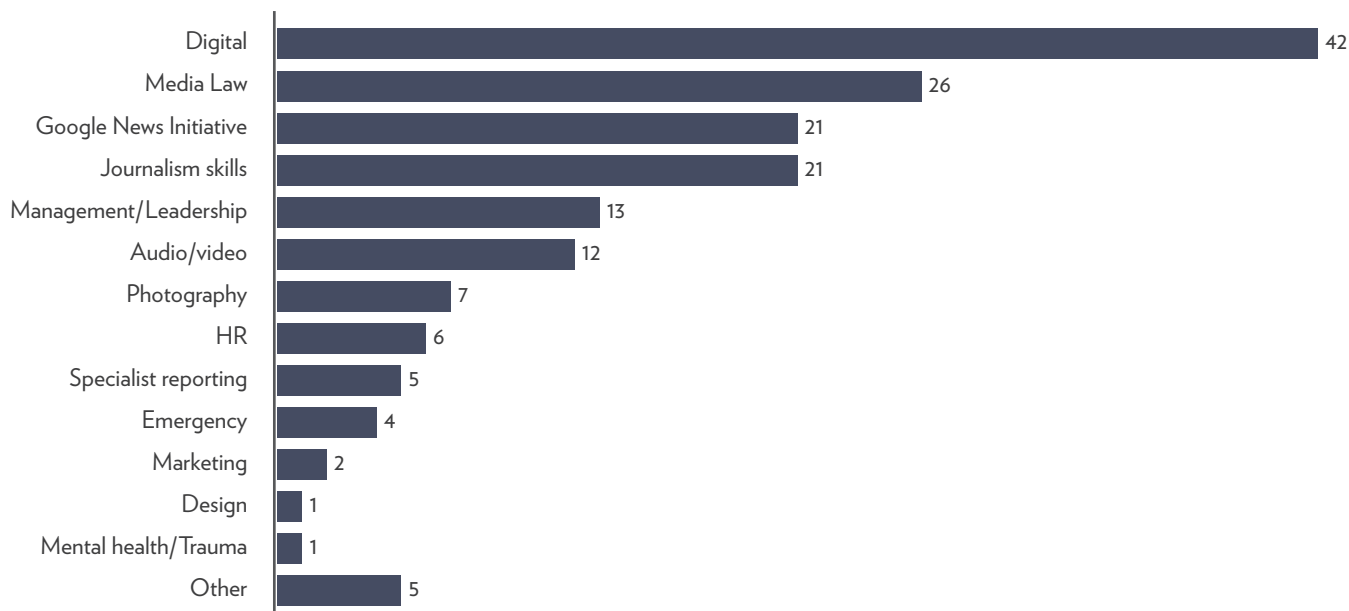


Q. In the past 12 months, did you participate in training or professional development provided by your news organisation?

In the past 12 months, digital skills training (42 cases) was the most frequently mentioned, followed by media law (26 cases), Google News Initiative, which includes digital search, verification and story telling skills (21 cases), and journalism skills (21 cases) (see Figure 32). 'Digital skills' include a wide range of skills such as social media, online content creation, data analytics, CMS, and SEO. There was only one mention of design, and one of mental health training out of the 166 open-ended responses.

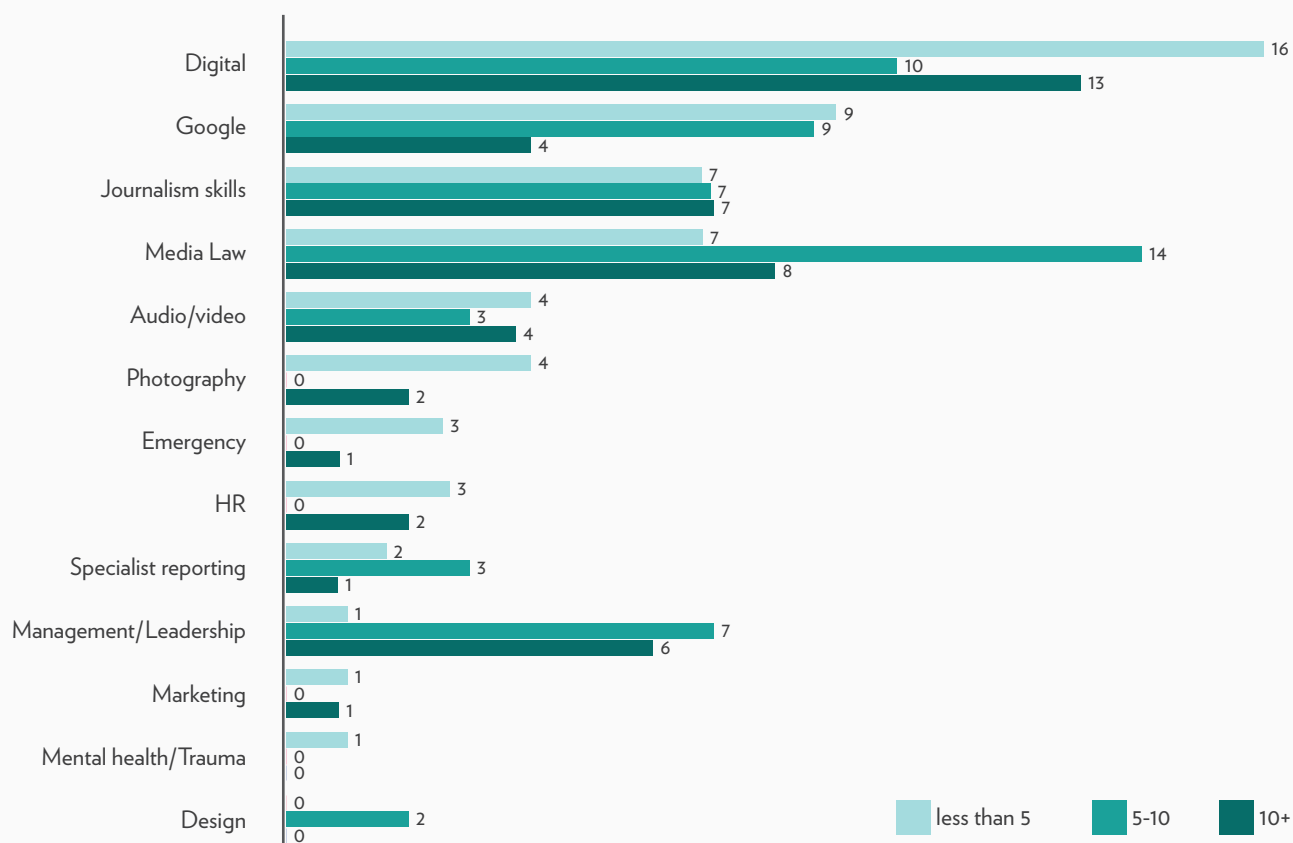
The types of training received were different depending on the level of experience as a journalist. Those with less experience (under 5 years) and those with more than 10 years' experience both received digital skills training the most. Those in their mid-careers (5-10 years' experience) received media law training more than the other two groups. The more experienced journalists received management and leadership training (see Figure 33).

Figure 32 | Training received in the past 12 months (N)



Q. Please list all the training activities you participated in (open-ended responses)

Figure 33 | Training activities in the past year by experience (%)



The type of training journalists received were very different depending on the type of media organisation they work for. As expected, TV and radio journalists received audio and video training more than print and online. Radio journalists received digital skills training the most (19%) followed by print journalists (16%). Only 11% of online journalists received digital skills training. Almost 10% of print journalists received journalism skills training in the past year. This is a higher figure compared to TV, radio, and online (see Figure 34).

However, a number of respondents also noted that regional journalists were often expected to adapt quickly and with limited formal on-the-job-training. In certain circumstances this meant early career journalists felt they were expected to “sink or swim”.

“From my own experience and what I have been forced to learn with no training. You are thrown in the deep end, which I’m sure is a common story.”

For some interviewees, this created additional work stress because they felt unprepared and pressured to self-train in specialised areas they may have limited experience with, such as court reporting or video production and editing.

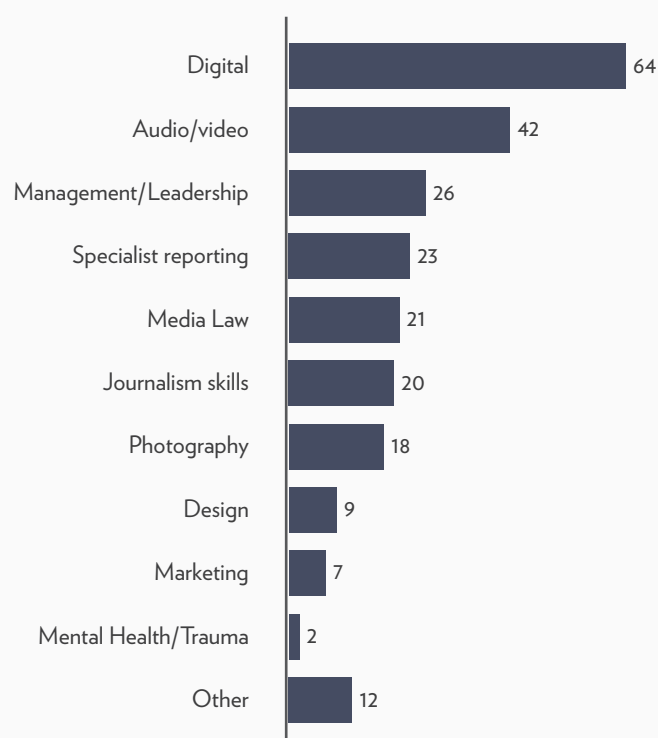
Figure 34 | Training activities in the past year by media (%)



TRAINING NEEDS

We also asked regional journalists what training they required to advance their future in journalism. A diverse range of areas were identified. Digital skills were mentioned 64 times and was the most frequently mentioned category. Other training needs were spread across a wide range of options, including audio/visual training, photography, media law training, management, and professional development (see Figure 35).

Figure 35 | Training needs for the future (N)



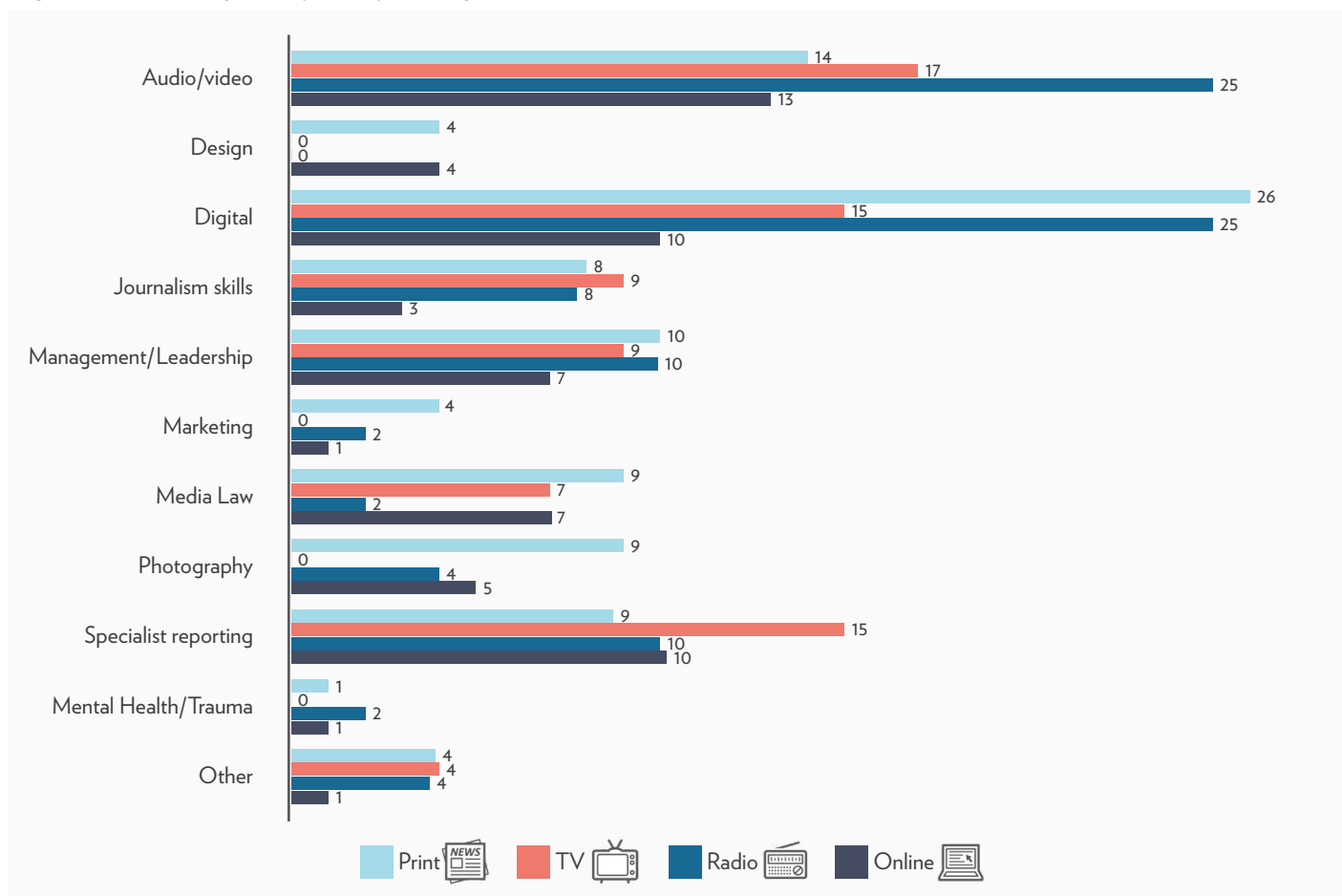
Those with more than 10 years of experience felt that they needed digital skills training the most to prepare for the future (28%), whereas less experienced journalists felt this need to a lesser degree (14% of the 'less than 5 years' experience cohort). The middle group (5-10 years' experience) expressed their need for audio/video skills (19%), digital skills (19%), management and leadership (12%), and specialist reporting skills (10%) as the higher ranked needs in training (see Figure 36). These findings suggest that management is not currently meeting the training needs of their staff.

Training needs of journalists differed by the type of media they currently work for. Radio journalists considered audio/video (25%) and digital skills (25%) to be the most urgent training needs. Print journalists said they need digital skills the most (26%) followed by audio/video (14%) and management/leadership (10%) (see Figure 37).

Figure 36 | Training needs by experience (%)



Figure 37 | Training needs for the future by media (%)



The interviews revealed that less experienced regional journalists were more likely to emphasise a need for training in engaging with the community, building rapport with sources of news, and writing articles.

A common theme was that university graduates were generally unprepared for the demands of working in a regional journalism role, and that without additional on-the-job training the quality of their output could be of a low standard.

“I’m appalled at the standard of some of the graduates that are coming to me [...] they’re coming to us with little to no knowledge of the real world.”

“Some of our journos are very young and need a lot more experience. Some of them need a lot more workplace learning [...] how to write effectively and confidently [...] and how to construct a story.”

Rather than seeking general training, interviewees were more likely to express a desire to undertake training in specialised journalistic roles, social media use, data analytics and news gathering.

“Specific training, specific understanding of online audiences. How they differ. Specific and a better understanding of how we are expected to mediate a Facebook audience that may have nothing to do with the people who read our online stories or listen to our radio or even watch our TV.”

“We do get a bit of training on it, but I think [we need] more of a deep dive into what makes a good social media post. What ticks the algorithm box on Facebook or what’s going to be a video that captures people’s attention.”

Others indicated their newsroom needed training in media law, defamation and court reporting.

Skills such as interpersonal communication and developing trust were also identified by more experienced regional journalists as important areas for further training.

DELIVERY OF TRAINING

Interviewees provided mixed responses about how additional training should be delivered and who should be responsible for providing it. Many agreed it was difficult to find time for training because their workloads were already substantial. A number suggested that face-to-face training from qualified and experienced professionals was preferable to online training. Others noted that if training was not followed up with real-world opportunities to implement what they had learned that it would not be effective.

CASE STUDY 3: CALEB CLUFF, THE COURIER, BALLARAT VICTORIA



Caleb Cluff is a Senior Journalist at The Ballarat Courier, a Walkley and Quill Awards finalist, and a member of the MEAA Board. Born in Dubbo, Cluff has made a career as a regional journalist for almost 20 years. After starting with ABC Ballarat in 2003, he worked in radio and online as a local cross-media reporter and producer for ABC Rural. After 12 years at the ABC he moved to The Courier where he currently works as a general reporter and mentor to the junior members of the Ballarat newsroom.

In 2019 he was nominated for a Walkley for his reporting on a staff culture of abuse and bullying in the women’s prison system of Victoria. He has received several awards for his work from the Rural Press Club of Victoria.

His work covers all aspects of life in the Ballarat community, from interviewing visiting musicians and artists, to covering political controversies and major crimes. Cluff told the research team that core journalistic skills were still essential to working as a regional journalist.

“You’ve got to know your turf. And a lot of it comes with forming contacts and having sources, understanding what the issues in the region are and are likely to be in the future [...] you’ve got to be brave. You’ve got to be able to front people and ask them tough questions.”

He also expressed concern that journalists with specialist experience were being drawn from the regions into the cities, leaving behind skills shortages in areas such as court reporting and videography.

Speaking about the future of regional journalism, Cluff stated that things were “taut” and that newsrooms were already facing difficulty covering local issues with reduced staff numbers. He argued that to find a path forward, media buyers needed to invest in their workforce and “think clearly about what they want the papers to do beyond advertising.”

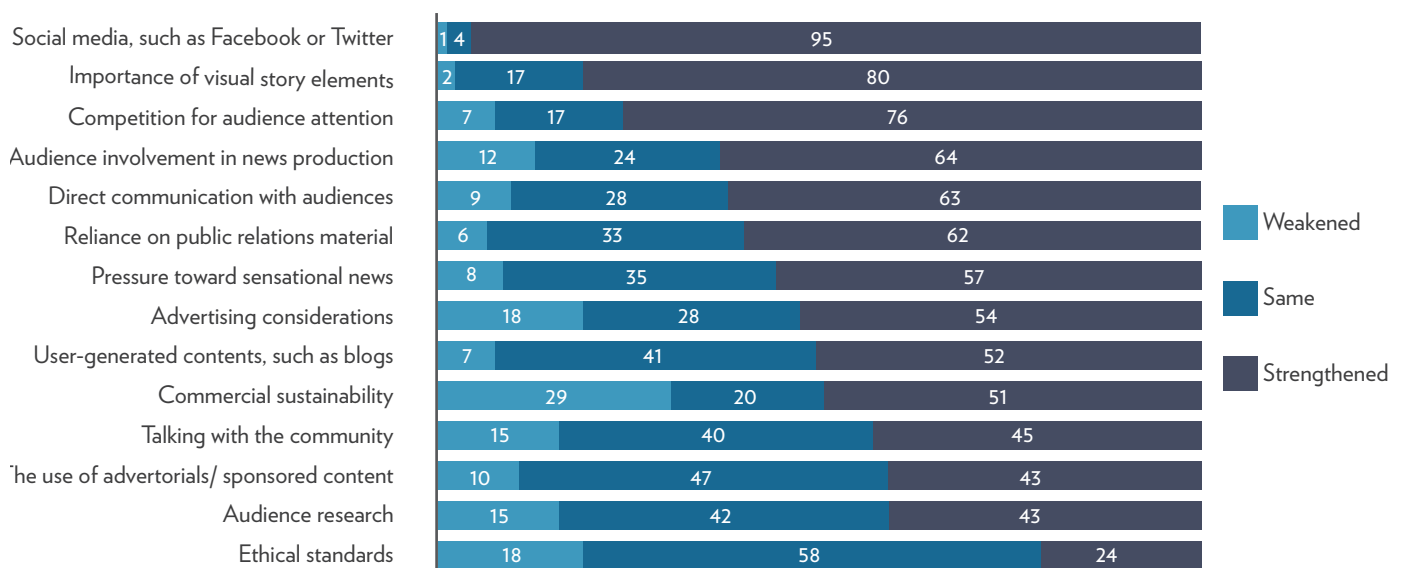
CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

CHANGES

The importance of some influences on regional journalism have changed over time. We asked regional journalists to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years. The influences that have become stronger include social media (95%), the importance of visual story elements (80%), competition for audience attention (76%), audience involvement in news production (64%), and the ability of sources

to directly communicate with audiences (63%). More than half (58%) saw ethical standards as having the same amount of influence as before, and 42% thought audience research hasn't changed its level of influence. Commercial sustainability was seen to have weakened (29%) (see Figure 38). *Please note, these questions were asked before the coronavirus outbreak.*

Figure 38 | Changes in journalism in the past five years (%)



Q. The importance of some influences on local/regional journalism may have changed over time. To what extent have these influences become stronger or weaker during the past five years? (Weakened a lot (1) Somewhat weakened (2) Did not change (3) Somewhat strengthened (4) Strengthened a lot (5), 1 and 2 recoded to 'weakened', 3 'same', and 4 and 5 recoded to 'strengthened')

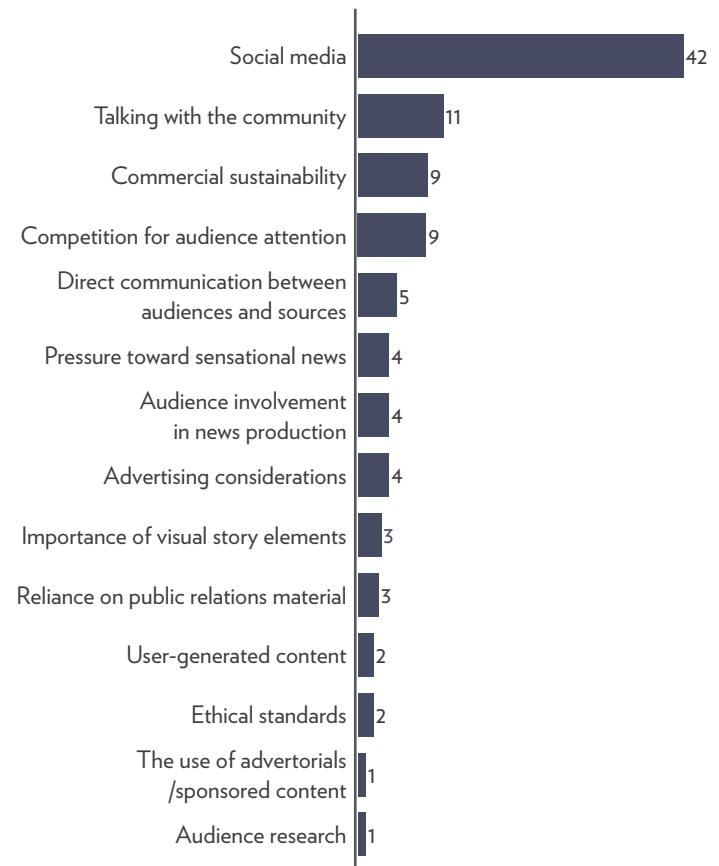
Among the various changes, we asked which was the most influential. One-third (42%) of the respondents said social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, had the largest impact on local and regional media, followed by talking with the community (11%), commercial sustainability (9%), and competition for audiences (9%) (see Figure 39).

There were no gender differences in the perception of these changes. However, younger journalists were significantly more likely to feel increased pressure towards producing sensational news and reliance on public relations material compared to older journalists. Journalists aged 40+ were significantly more likely to think that commercial sustainability had a large influence on regional news in the past five years.

Similarly, regional journalists with 10+ years of experience were more likely to think that commercial sustainability and User Generated Content had a large influence on regional news.

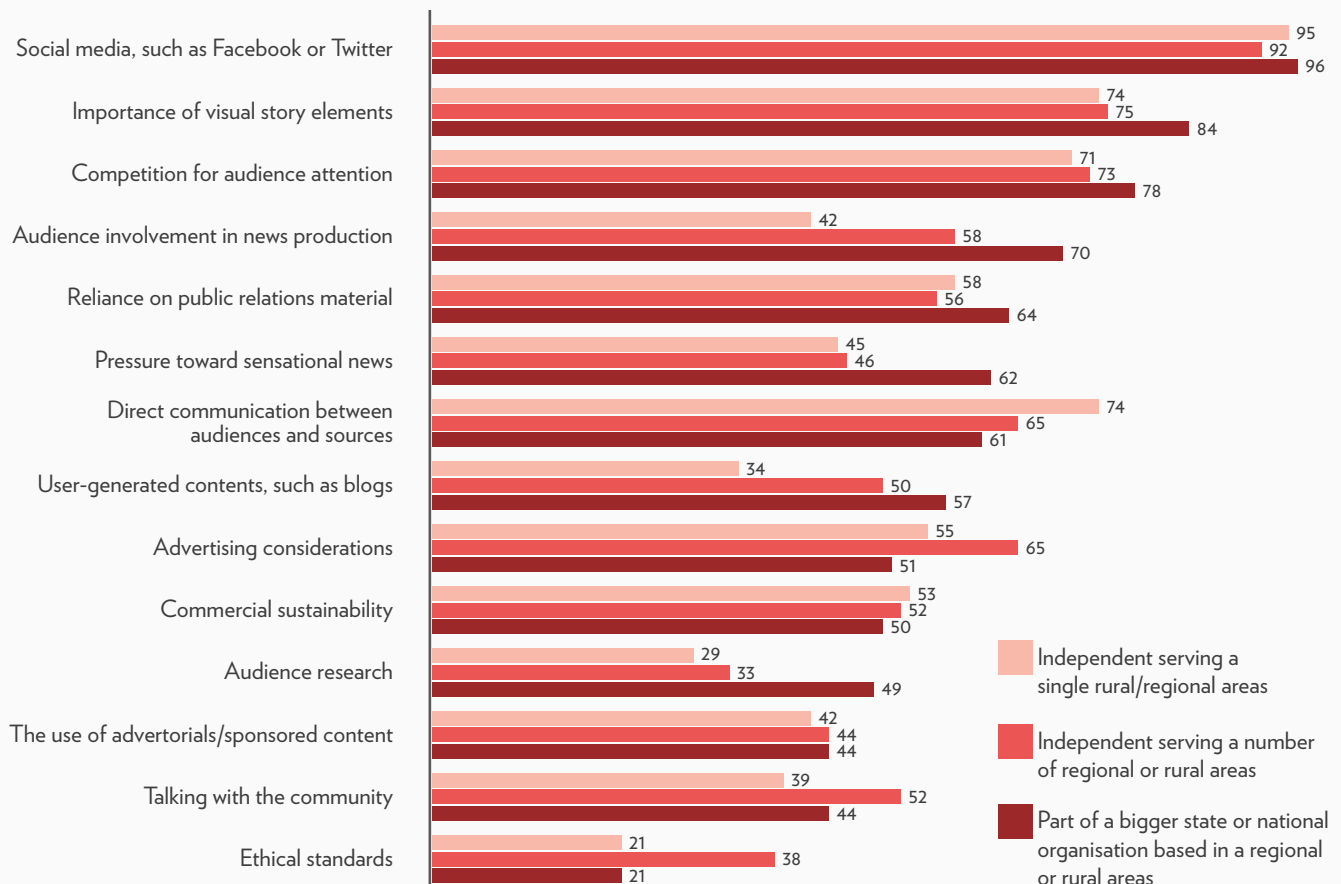
Journalists from larger state or national organisations were more likely to agree that the influence of audience involvement in news production (70%), the pressure toward sensational news (62%), and audience research (49%) have become stronger influences over the past 5 years. On the other hand, journalists from independent news organisations that serve a single region, were more likely to feel that the ability of sources to directly communicate with audiences (75%) has become more important in recent years. Journalists from independent organisations serving a number of regions were more likely to feel that advertising considerations (65%), talking with the community (52%), and ethical standards (38%) have strengthened (see Figure 40).

Figure 39 | Most influential changes in the past five years (%)



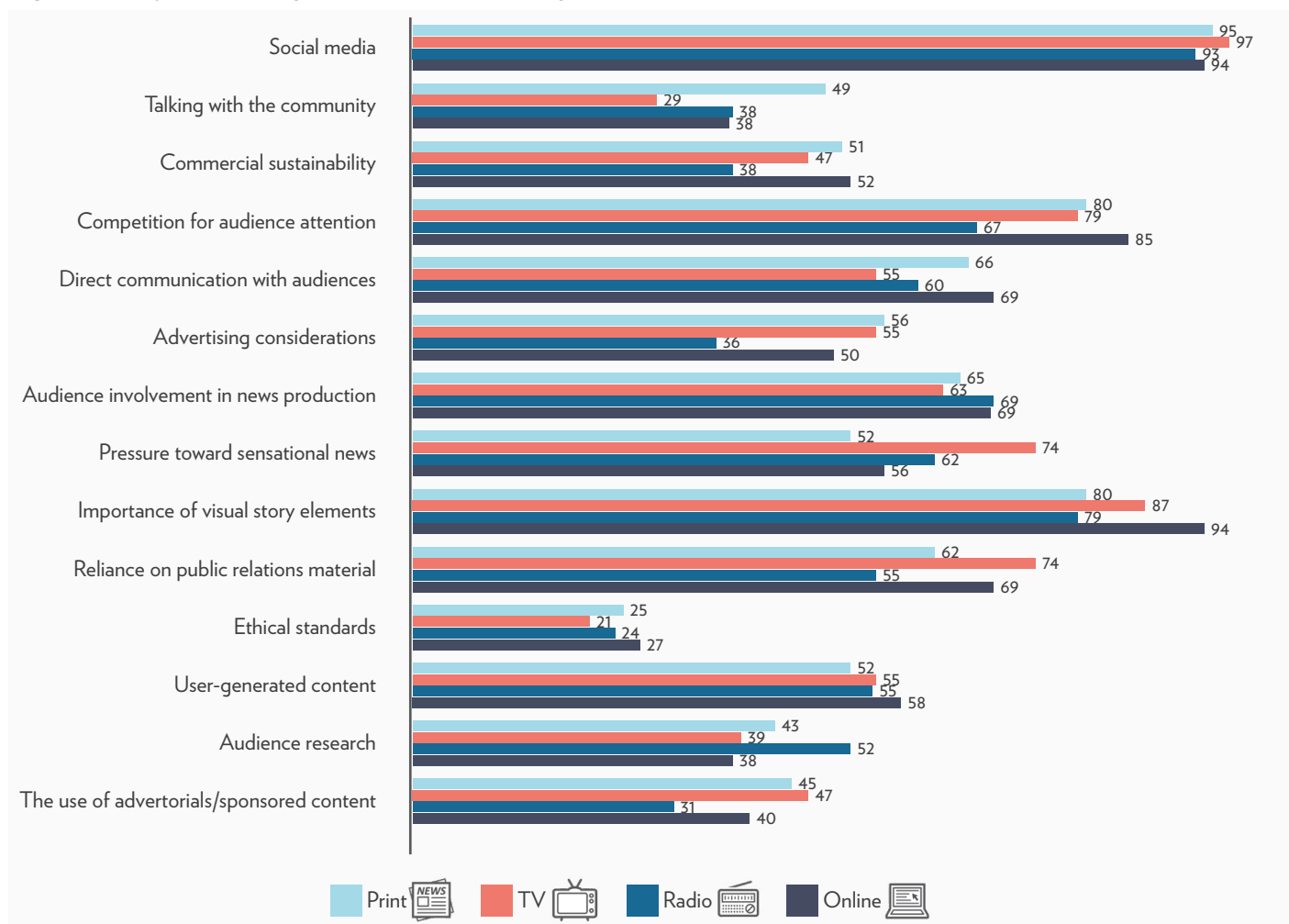
Q. Which change has influenced you the most in the past five years?

Figure 40 | Strengthened influence by type of organisation (%)



Journalists who work for print news organisations were more likely to feel the growing influence of talking with the community (49%). TV journalists were more likely to feel growing pressure toward sensational news and sponsored content (74%), and reliance on public relations materials (74%). Online journalists were more likely to feel the growing competition for audience attention (85%), direct communication between audiences and sources (69%), importance of visual story elements (94%), and user-generated content (58%) (see Figure 41).

Figure 41 | Influence ‘Strengthened a lot/somewhat’ by media (%)



CHALLENGES

We asked respondents what obstacles most affected their ability to perform as journalists. Time was mentioned 97 times, resources 94 times, and workload 26 times. Geographical distance (20), a lack of technical infrastructure and technology (21), and management of their employer (16) were also among the top factors (see Table 3).

Table 3 | Obstacles that affect the job (open-ended responses)

| OBSTACLES | FREQUENCY |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Time | 97 |
| Resources | 94 |
| Workload | 26 |
| Technology | 21 |
| Distance | 20 |
| Management/Leadership | 16 |
| PR & Spin | 11 |
| Communication | 5 |

Q. Thinking about your own work, what obstacles most affect your ability to do your job?

The perceived obstacles were different by the length of experience of a journalist. Those who have 5-10 years' experience felt that lack of resources (40%) and time (36%) were the most challenging. They also thought workload was a critical obstacle (16%). A quarter (25%) of those with less than 5 years' experience mentioned lack of resources as a main obstacle and 33% answered 'time' (see Figure 42).

Print and TV journalists were more likely to feel challenges in their job. Print journalists ranked the lack of resources to be the most important obstacle in their job (38%) followed by time (35%). TV journalists saw time (37%) as the biggest obstacle and to a lesser degree the lack of resources (26%) (see Figure 43).

Figure 42 | Obstacles in work by experience (%)

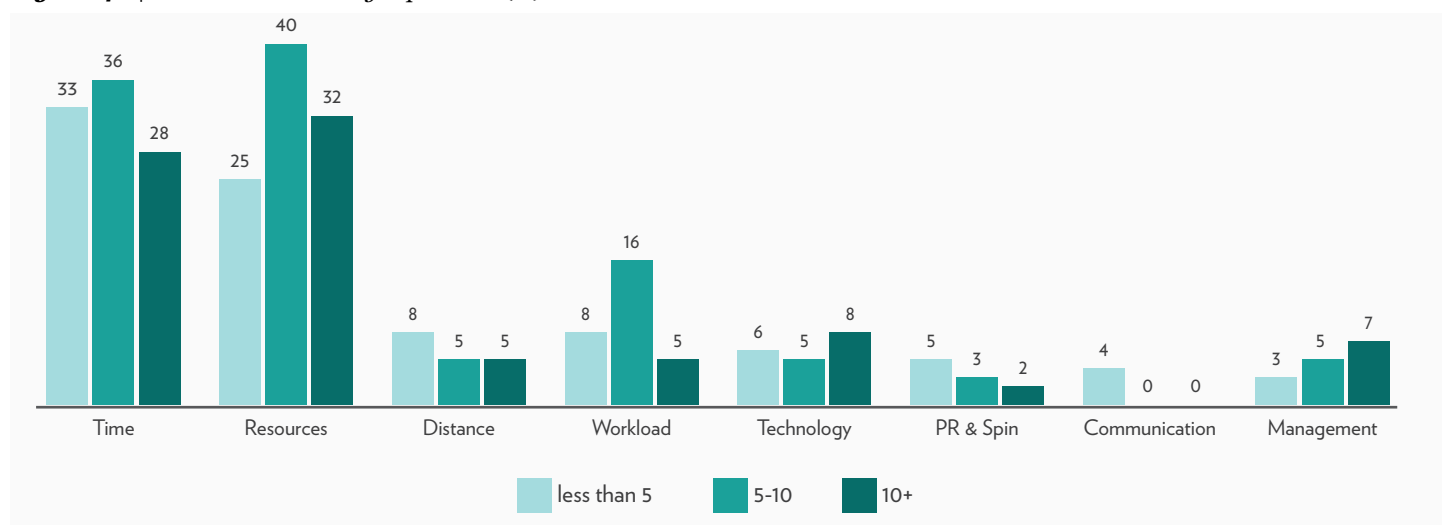
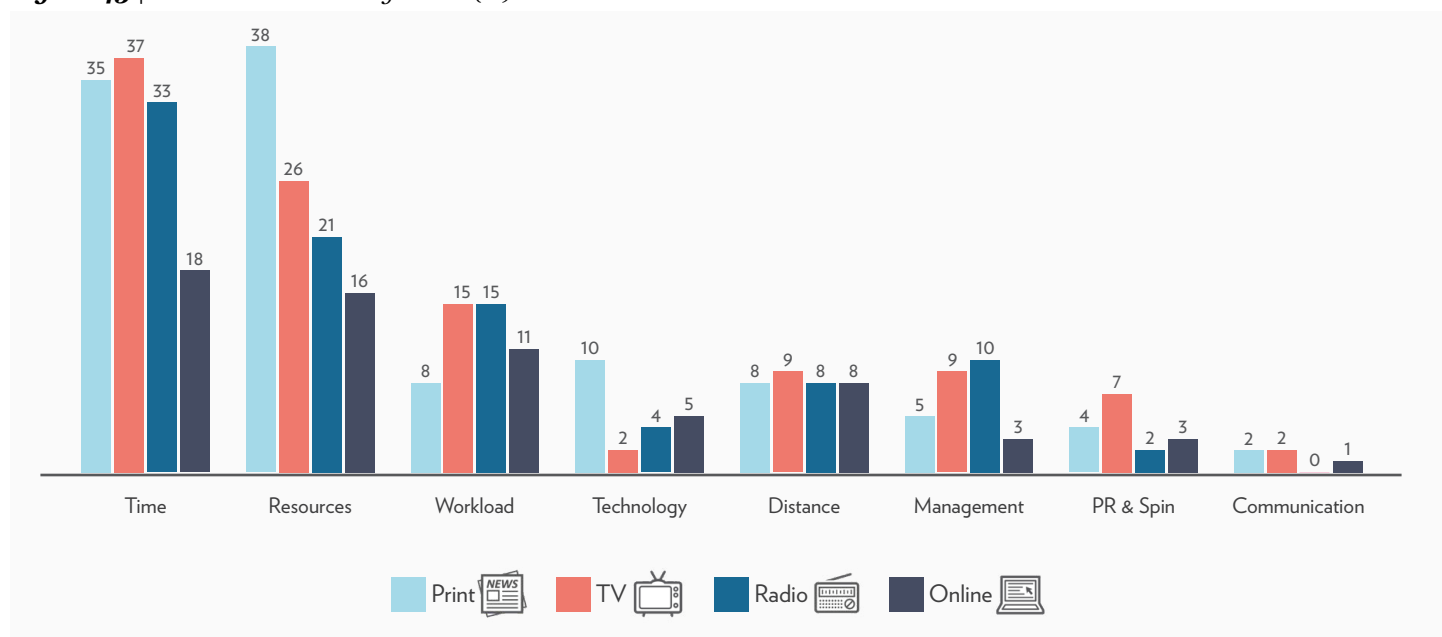


Figure 43 | Perceived obstacles by media (%)



SOLUTIONS

MORE RESOURCES

Interviewees for this research suggested a range of solutions that could help to support regional journalists and improve the state of the industry. Some stated that the most substantial benefit would be felt from increased resourcing for news production; whether that be in the form of public funding, reallocation of existing resources, or support to increase advertising revenue.

“They just need to put money in to pay for staff [...] If you have good staff, you do good stories, you get bigger readership, you get more advertising. It’s a pretty straightforward formula.”

Others argued that to improve revenue, the quality of the news services offered in regional areas needed to be substantially improved.

“I could see it happening if someone could see a real benefit in improving the quality of their news to a point where people will agree to pay for it and the readership would build up to a state where they can hire some more staff.”

In lieu of better resourcing, the next most common theme interviewees discussed was a need for accessible training, and the time to actually engage with it.

MORE RECOGNITION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FROM CITY-BASED LEADERSHIP

While training and resources were rated as important by regionally based journalists, an important theme that emerged from the interviews was the need for support and understanding from city-based media owners and leadership.

Regional journalists who worked for larger state and national news outlets expressed frustration with their city-based managers. As the below comments show, regional reporters feel their editors in Sydney and other capital cities did not understand the working conditions in the regional bureaux, did not prioritise regional stories, and did not value the expertise of their local reporters.

“[Sydney] needs to send out their producers to the regional areas to understand how different things are out here, because they want things a certain way but we can’t really do it out here. And they’re not telling us what they want.”

“I feel like the company doesn’t value the relationships that we have and the connection with our audience that we have.”

A number of interviewees recounted instances where city-based journalists had been sent out to cover stories that local journalists had already reported on, or situations where their reporting had been taken and broadcast in a metro area leaving them unable to run the story in a local market.

“They look down on us. That’s a massive thing. All the Sydney producers think we’re like country bumpkins.”

“Our stories are often used in the city but we never get any of the resources that they’re allowed or any of the funds.”

“The drought is really, really bad out here, so the Sydney journalists are coming to our area and doing stories to air on their news. So, they’re taking stuff away from us. And now we don’t really cover it that much because Sydney are always doing it.”

It was the view of some regional journalists that metropolitan organisations did not understand the lack of resources their newsroom had, leading to unrealistic expectations from management about regional news performance.


“They often will make us go out to do stories for them and we’re like, on a deadline or we’ve already got several other things that we’re working on. [...] My newsroom is two people.”

“We are run by metro people who have never worked in a country newspaper in their lives... and they will make decision that won’t be very good for regional”.


This cultural gap between metro and regional news bureaux was particularly highlighted during the bushfire crisis in December 2019. Some journalists who were based in areas affected by the bushfires reported that they had been pushed into support roles, as city-based journalists were sent out to cover fires in areas local journalists had worked for many years.

“Most of the vision in bushfires while we had the crisis through northern New South Wales was coming from stringers and helicopters out of Brisbane and out of Sydney, rather than our own resources.”

In addition to feeling undervalued and overlooked, many interviewees from large media organisations said they were not receiving due credit for their work and were more generally pessimistic about the future.



THE FUTURE



The survey and interviews painted a somewhat contradictory picture between their love of the role and the pressures they are under to deliver that role. Despite concern about the difficulties facing regional journalism in Australia, the interviewees in this study were generally positive, though uncertain, about the future. While many stated they were optimistic about their career and the future of regional news organisations, others emphasised the big challenges facing the industry. Interviewees highlighted overwork, a lack of resources for news production, shrinking audiences, and diminishing advertising revenue as significant causes of concern.

However, many were also positive about the future of regional journalism, citing community support, a strong demand for local stories, and news organisations that were adaptive to the changing market.

As one interviewee stated:

“I don’t believe regional journalism is dying at all. I think regional journalism is doing really well, [...] the regional journalism that survives is adapting to what the community wants and is being intelligent about the way it’s going about it”.

A common theme for many journalists was that audiences in regional towns and cities still wanted to read, listen to, and watch news stories about their local community. Journalists expressed a strong sense of identification with members of their community regardless of whether they had a long history of living in their town or region. Some argued that their role as advocates for local community issues and concerns was key to the survival of rural and regional news organisations.

While many of the journalists said they were confident about the future of local journalism, there were differing interpretations of what that future might look like.

Some were personally confident about their own roles and organisations, but there was widespread acceptance that job losses, amalgamations, and further cuts to services were likely. Many interviewees agreed that as the industry changed, the mix of news media available would vary, and the coverage and quality of regional journalism could no longer be guaranteed.

“I see regional journalism as an [...] important tool for the community, but it’s being watered down because we simply don’t have the time or resources to execute a really quality product.”

“They are slammed. What gets printed is definitely not of a high standard, and I know it’s hard for them morale-wise in their offices.”

Overall, regional journalists interviewed were optimistic, albeit somewhat unsure, about the future of regional journalism in Australia.

It is important to remember these comments were made prior to COVID-19 and the subsequent closure and suspension of so many regional and local newspapers. Were the survey participants asked the same questions today, it is very likely they would tell us the stresses and uncertainty they identified pre-COVID have become greater.

Further research needs to be done to accurately gauge the impact recent events have had on how regional journalists view the future.

DIFFERENCE IN PERSPECTIVE: INDEPENDENT AND LARGE MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

A distinct theme that emerged throughout the interviews was that regional journalists saw smaller independent news organisations as reacting differently to the changing economic climate, compared to larger and

syndicated news organisations. These findings are clearest when looking at the contrast between optimism and concerns for the future.

OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE

Among regional journalists interviewed for this study, those who worked for independent news organisations and in smaller communities tended to be the most optimistic about the future. At small independent newspapers, journalists reported a close connection with their community and a sense that locals were supportive and invested in the continuation of their work.

“If you’re asking about [the town] in general, you do still have a good cohort of people who by the paper here [...] I’d actually buck the trend a bit and say regional journalism here will continue to be read.”

“As far as I can see some of the smaller regional and rural publications have probably held up better than some of the many metropolitan papers.”

“I presume the people talking about the death of regional journalists are in the city. I’m not sure. Because it’s very strong all across Australia, I believe.”

While many interviewees expressed concern about drought and de-population reducing their advertising revenue, some noted the contraction of larger and metropolitan based news organisations provided opportunities for their smaller news organisations to grow.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Interviewees expressed a range of concerns about the future of regional journalism. For many, the most significant concern was that news organisations in smaller communities would be forced to close leaving locals without a source of news that reflected their lives and stories.

“If there’s no one in the regions to break the stories, find out what’s happening, let people know what’s happening [...] the community will definitely be at a loss. And yeah, we know they want us, they come to us because they want to hear all that stuff. And no one else [...] is going to come up and cover those stories.”

“If we shut down it’s not going to be a Sydney journo and crew [who] will come out and pick up stories. [...] it’s an easy way to make money in the city, the chances are they’ll do that and forget about the country.”

While journalists working at independent news organisations were generally confident about future demand for their work in regional areas, some did express concern that print newspapers in particular were vulnerable due to reduced circulation.

“I think papers are slowly dying. Not so much because of lack of interest, but because the audience are actually dying themselves, for want of a better term.”

“When we have pulled out of things, other little papers have started, or Facebook groups or webpages have started it, I think there is a demand.”

“In the last 12 months we’ve expanded. So, we’re distributing a thousand extra copies a week and we’ve expanded into two additional towns to where we’re based.”

Others saw opportunity in the prospects of online news and expanding into social media spaces to reach younger members in the community and individuals living in remote areas.

“The internet and the changing face of print and radio creates so much opportunity to disrupt. There’s a disruptor in the market and it’s a wonderful role to occupy.”

For some independent regional journalists, the opportunities presented by digital and social media provided them with confidence, provided they could access the training, resources and research needed to take full advantage. Some noted that a lack of quality internet and mobile phone infrastructure in regional areas presented a significant roadblock to their work.

Regional journalists working for larger city-based news organisations were generally more pessimistic about the future of their industry than those at smaller and independent organisations. Views between these two groups of journalists diverged, with those in larger organisations more likely to report concern that positions might be cut or that previously vacated positions might not be filled.

“We’re obviously facing cuts yet again with a freeze [...] the atmosphere is changing literally day-by-day and it’s a tough environment to be around.”

“They’re about to sack their cameraman is the word on the street and replace them with video journalists, so all the reporters will have to shoot their own stories, and edit them as well.”

Some expressed concern for their own jobs and noted that morale within their newsroom was low, and that this was influencing the way people approached their reporting.

“There is a sense of uncertainty about the existence of all our roles in a few years [...] there’s an absolute [sense] of something hanging over everyone’s heads.”

“Hopefully the company won’t do anything drastic like shut us down, or, I don’t know if they would ever sell us. I mean, I don’t know. I don’t know.”

LEARNING FROM INDEPENDENT NEWS ORGANISATIONS: CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY

Among those interviewed for this study, regional journalists working for smaller and independent news organisations were more likely to view their outlet as more community oriented and more likely to report on local stories from a local perspective.

“They’re very much centred around a service model, a community service model and living within their means [...] the goal of serving the local community seems to be serving them well.”

“The independent locally owned operators [...] can obviously do a much better job than the syndicated, or a bigger company where the numbers are always going to win out in the bigger centres.”

In contrast, a number of interviewees viewed larger newspapers in particular as less reflective of the stories and interests of the local community. This was sometimes attributed to the amount of content in syndicated newspapers that was sourced from newswires and metropolitan newsrooms.

“They’re not the same as us, we are so focused on presenting heaps of community news. [...] It’s all about presenting stories that our community cares about”.

“You can see that desperate grab for profit when you look at some of these other syndicated papers, you can see it, it stands out a mile.”

Regional journalists working at large media organisations were also more likely to express a belief that their newsroom would face further cuts or be amalgamated with other newsrooms in the region.

“In the long term I don’t see daily newspapers in the regions. I see daily newspapers covering maybe the entire North Coast [...] if not that it will be papers that are cut down to weekly or bi-weekly and then ultimately just online.”

“A lot of the small papers are going to have to merge with bigger papers to stay sustainable [...] if you’ve got one set of journalists who can cover a wider area, then I think it’s going to be a lot more financially viable.”

When discussing the prospect of further change in the industry, journalists working for larger media organisations were more likely to reference previous staff cuts, amalgamations, and closed newsrooms as a measure for the future. For some, it was clear their direct experience of being part of an organisation facing significant uncertainty and turmoil was a strong predictor of their views about the future of regional journalism.

CASE STUDY 4: LEE O’CONNOR – EDITOR, THE COONAMBLE TIMES



Lee O’Connor is a Reporter, Editor, and owner of the Coonamble Times, the 135-year-old weekly newspaper that serves the town and surrounding district of Coonamble, 160km north of Dubbo in the New South Wales central-western plains.

Prior to becoming a journalist, O’Connor spent many years as a regional advocate and community worker in Coonamble and far west NSW, including an almost 15-year stint as the Economic Development Manager for the Coonamble Shire Council. A prominent leader in her community, she has held the roles of president of the Coonamble Chamber of Commerce, president of the Coonamble High School P&C, and vice president of Country Press NSW.

In 2017, O’Connor took the unusual step of buying her local newspaper.

She described it as an “extreme learning curve”. With Coonamble facing a sustained drought, local businesses are doing it tough and as such the Times has seen a reduction in advertising revenue. To help turn things

around O’Connor applied for and received funding for a cadet position and an innovation grant from the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund to develop a digital content and marketing strategy for the paper.

O’Connor sees the possibility of success in bringing one of New South Wales’ oldest print newspapers into online and social media spaces. She told the research team that she was optimistic about the future of regional journalism.

“My belief is that every community deserves a good newspaper, every place needs to have its own news as well as news from over the levee bank. You know, it’s for the public record, it’s for community identity, it’s so that the local people can actively engage in their community, get to know each other.”

While she expressed concerns about the changing nature of the industry, O’Connor said that she believed there was a capacity for organisations to adapt and meet the needs of audiences. For her it was more than just business:

“My view of regional journalism is it has a social purpose, and I think it would be hard for these regions to thrive without that.”



CONCLUSION



While there have been government and industry programmes developed to assist regional journalism, the voices of practitioners have been largely missing from the debate. The central aim of this study was to find out what regional journalists themselves need and how they see the future.

The 307 regional journalists in our study enjoyed reporting in their communities. However, they felt hampered by a lack of resources and time, with many feeling overworked and underpaid.

We asked a range of detailed questions about the skills regional journalists think are important and if there were any areas they needed help. While there is clearly a strong demand for digital training, much of the need expressed by reporters was for training in basic journalism skills, like writing and building contact networks, and media law, as well as court reporting, data journalism, FOI, and investigative skills.

This points to a lack of support for time-poor graduates learning on the job in resource-strapped newsrooms. Additional support is needed for news outlets to support their new recruits and older staff with tailored ongoing training. Programs that can facilitate retraining of journalists in their mid to late career can bridge this gap between university degrees and the workplace.

Despite concern about the future of regional journalism, there was quite a lot of optimism amongst the interviewees. However, this varied depending on the type of news organisation they worked for.

The study identified big differences in morale and connection to community between independent local news outlets and larger news organisations. Journalists in smaller independent outlets tended to be more optimistic about the future. They attributed this to the family-nature of the organisation, the strong connection with their audience, and serving the community. In contrast, journalists working for larger news organisations felt less optimistic and less secure in their jobs. Decisions about their future were made in boardrooms in the cities far from their local bureaux. There are naturally exceptions to this. One interviewee said her newspaper in NSW operated like a family business even though it was part of a larger organisation. It had great connection with the community and the staff felt secure, albeit underpaid. All advocated for the need for strong, local news in their communities.

While this study cannot claim to be representative of all regional journalists, it does reflect the perspectives of 15% across different media platforms. Importantly, it points to the different needs of print, radio, online, and TV journalists, and those with less and more experience.

We hope the data in this report and the following discussion points help to add nuance to policy and industry considerations about the future of regional journalism in Australia. We hope to encourage decision makers not to focus exclusively on support for innovation and technology, but for the wide variety of needs of journalists in newsrooms outside of the capital cities. In a post-COVID-19 environment, regional journalists will need more support than ever.

DISCUSSION: WAYS FORWARD

DIGITAL TRAINING

The results show there is still a clear demand for digital skills in relation to social media, digital tools, software, and online content. Existing support programmes should be continued to support those regional journalists still seeking assistance. However, the needs were different depending on the medium and experience of the journalist. Therefore, a tailored approach to digital skills training is necessary.

JOURNALISM EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

- **JOURNALISTS WITH LESS THAN FIVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE:**

The report highlights a gap in skills for junior journalists, in relation to media law, court reporting, data journalism, audio and video production, plus basic skills such as writing and building contacts. This points to an opportunity for university Journalism degrees to give greater emphasis to these skills and help fill these gaps.

- **MID-CAREER AND SENIOR JOURNALISTS:**

Mid-career and senior journalists' training needs are more diverse ranging from digital skills to leadership and media law. This presents an opportunity for education providers to tailor short targeted programmes to educate these journalists in the field. However, given that the biggest obstacle for regional journalists is shortage of time, wider support is necessary. For most journalists in the region, it is unrealistic to leave work for an intensive training program, because they may not have colleagues to fill the void while they are in the training. Government/industry support for journalism training to be delivered face to face in regional newsrooms is one solution. However, a more holistic resolution needs to be devised that helps address the issue of staff shortages while others receive training.

MORALE & WELLBEING

To improve morale and communication in larger news organisations, editors/management could visit regional newsrooms more often, and offer more regular opportunities for regional staff to spend time in the metropolitan newsrooms.

Many working in regional newsrooms said they feel isolated, lack mentorship and support. This can have an impact on staff wellbeing, especially younger reporters who have moved away from family and friends. News organisations need to ensure all reporters are aware of, and have access to, mental health and trauma supports, such as the resources provided by the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma and Counselling. For young reporters, more frequent trips home could also be considered.

The development of new, and expansion of existing, collaborative networks between small independent regional media, would help journalists seek support and mentoring from other organisations in a non-competitive, collegial way. One such approach is that of Jenkins and Graves's (2019) collaborative journalism which is defined as initiatives or projects through which journalists from different news organisations work with one another and with other actors – such as technologists, data scientists, academics, and community members – to report, produce, and distribute news. Examples of collaborative regional journalism already exist, but with support, they could be developed further.

WORKLOAD AND RESOURCES

It is clear from this study that there is an urgent need to increase the resourcing in regional journalism, and that the overworked and underpaid environment with a shrinking workforce is not sustainable. A multitude of efforts are needed to resolve this issue, including developing new forms of public funding, reallocating existing resources for improved business models, and adopting strategies to increase advertising revenue and consumer subscription. Additional short-term funding has been provided by Government and industry to help deal with the economic impact of COVID-19. However, long term solutions need to be found to ensure the sustainability of the regional news media.

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